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ISSUE 173 • DECEMBER 2005 • FREE

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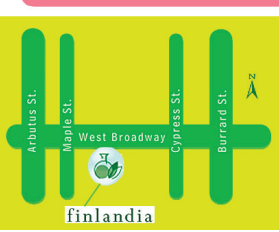

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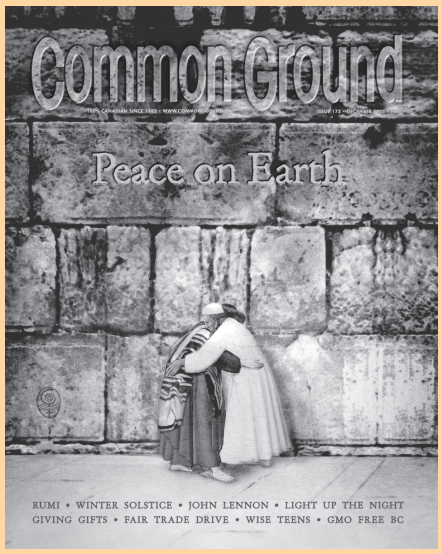
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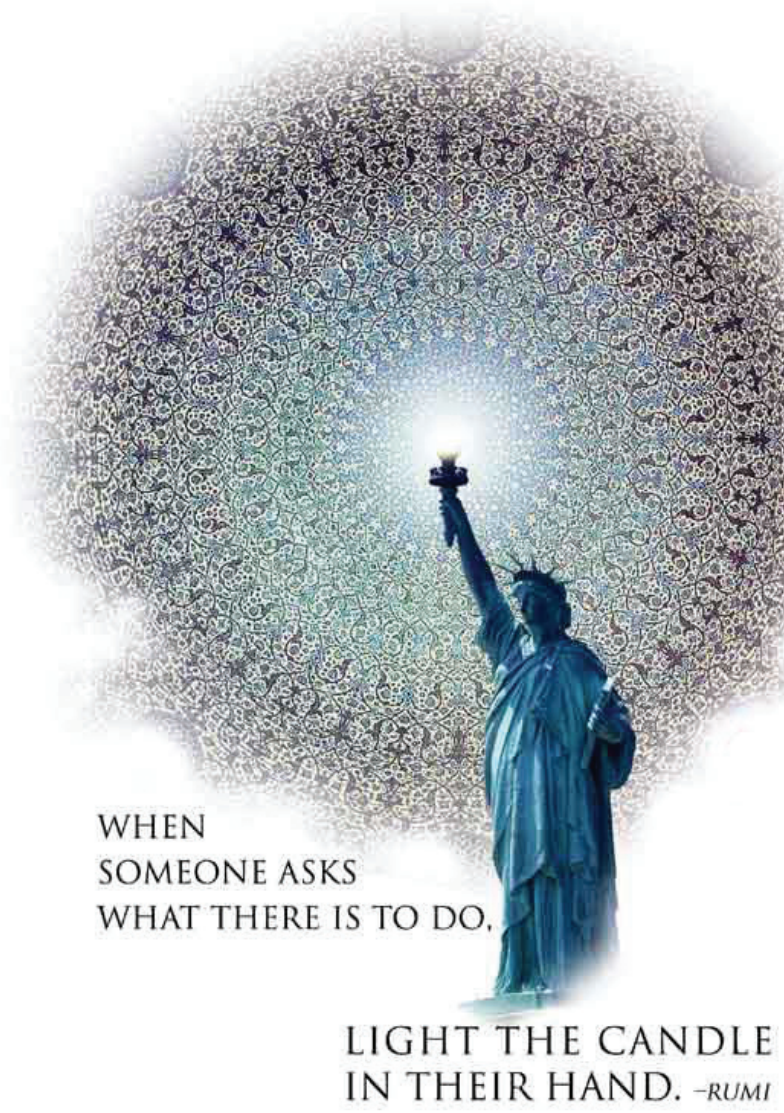
Our cover
The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem: original art by Michael Green, author of *One Song – A New Illuminated Rumi*, Running Press. www.runningpress.com. Visit *One Song* online at www.theilluminationco.com



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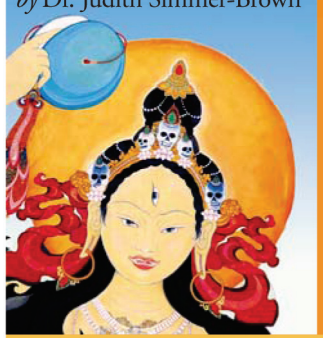

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Illuminating Rumi

ONE SONG – SOMETHING BIG IS COMING

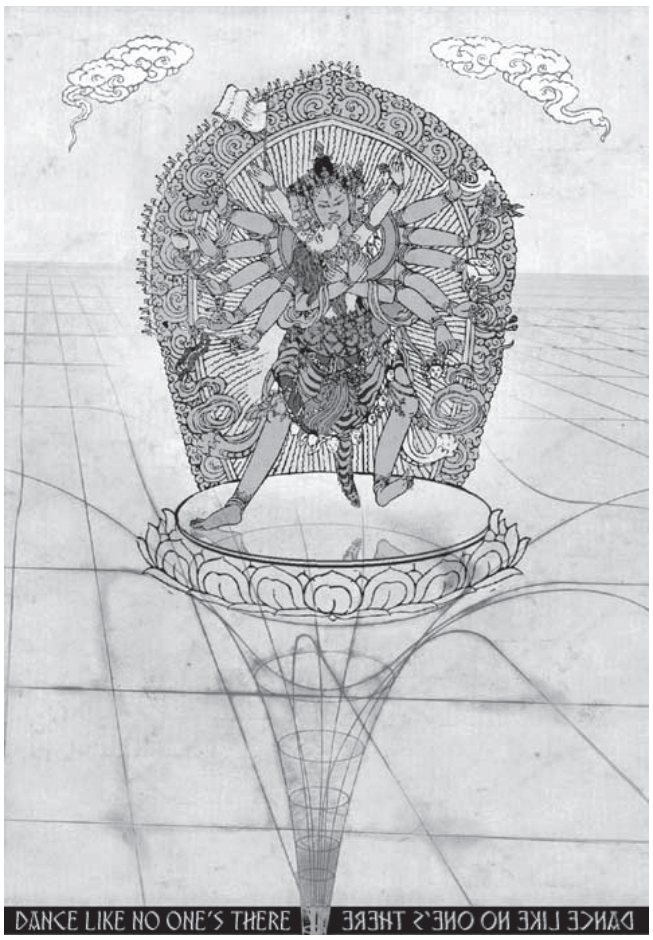
by Michael Green

Seven years ago, I collaborated with Georgia poet Coleman Barks to create a book called *The Illuminated Rumi*. I wanted to combine words and images in a way that would reach people who don't ordinarily read poetry, or Rumi. Something came together right, and the book became a national bestseller.

But times change; 9/11 brought a whole new meanspiritedness to the ethers, and it seemed like a call for a new Rumi book. As I began, I was thinking about a particular piece of Iroquois wisdom, which describes three kinds of healing. First, there's personal medicine, as when a doctor fixes a sprained ankle. And then spirit medicine, the business of opening hearts and shining light into dark places, which is what good ministers do, and grandparents, and best friends, and certainly what Rumi did in his native land. This is what the First Nations call clan medicine, the healing of an entire community.

I realized, yes, that's what Rumi is doing now. For centuries a beloved soul guide in the East, now, astonishingly, he's the most widely-read poet in the West. Somehow, in a media world populated with weird, even madhouse, images of Muslims, a gentle Sufi mystic has not only become part of our culture, he's emerged as the most sympathetic Muslim figure we know, an icon for fundamental sanity. At the very moment when our community, which is the global community, is busy building walls to divide religions, along comes Rumi throwing up a bridge of light over these walls, connecting hearts and cultures. Pure planetary healing!

My teacher, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, who was also a Sufi, was once asked what his religion was. "Whatever religion God is, that's my religion," he replied. Rumi would have answered the same way, as would any deep believer. But, as we know, the devil is in the details, those picky little details where paths don't cross-reference, the place where "We're right and you're not."



Here's where Rumi really matters, because the place where we find God's religion, where all the songs make "one song," is in another state of being altogether, a state of grace where some fundamental construct of the "I" with all its non-negotiable dogmas and theologies, is left behind. In this place, God alone is real. Ultimately, Rumi matters because he's witnessing from this place, which is not only outside of mind, but also outside of time. Rumi witnesses right now as well as back then. It's this immediacy, or presence, that comes though in his poetry, even in translation.

Rumi's poetry is not just word play; it's something sourced from "central intelligence." It's the Truth that passeth all understanding, the Truth that turns swords into plowshares, and Rumi's genius is in finding fresh ways to restate that Truth. "All religions," he says, "All this singing, one song." It's a vast truth, and hard to defend, but considering how we're all getting ramped up for jihad right now, it may be the message of the hour. Rumi has another poem, which begins, "Something big is coming. It's still secret, but arriving everywhere…" The poem ends with these words: "The atmosphere is charged with longing and searching. Then the sound of prayer drifts across the dawn. It's Muslim, Jew, and Christian all mingled…"

That marvelous longing and searching and mingling has a mighty good feel to it, but these are mighty times, and right now great masses of people are discovering a very different and exciting power in the "I've got it and you don't" experience. When you're with a whole army of believers with the same inside scoop, it's positively thrilling. And intensely masculine "I talk, you listen" so it's a difficult field to approach. But if we can effect a quiet shift of focus away from duelling belief systems to a deeper layer of being, to looking for who it is that's "got it," we may discover that that old, cloven-hoofed deceiver "I" is somehow running the show again, albeit this time from the pulpit and wearing theologian's robes. As George Harrison's song lyrics note, the problem is always I, me, mine.

What's marvelous about Rumi is that he's not a misty, New Age Buddhist/Wiccan/Hindu/whatever devotee; he's a card-carrying Muslim. He works within a certain set of beliefs. One minute, he's a Muslim moth, circling the candle flame according to Muslim precepts. In the next moment, he suddenly just chucks it and dives for the light, burning everything up as he goes: beliefs, models, differences, self, anything other than the indestructible great mystery. So his field reports and his teachings are always trying to convey a subtle figure, a ground shift.

From one perspective, we can buy into a package, a Way, a tradition full of richness and wisdom. Shifting our point of view, we have the profound realization that we can't bring that package through the gates of heaven, that, in the end, it is a model for something that can't even be talked about. To look in this direction is to somehow start granting the others, the Jews, or the Muslims, or the Christians, their space too. Then the work is about keeping an open-heart connection, so that they don't become the Other, and to recognize that the differences are only harmonies inside one song. Many people sense the grandeur of this view now, realizing that it's growing and expanding and gathering strength: "Something big is coming."

> ***Something big is coming. It's still secret, but arriving everywhere… The atmosphere is charged with longing and searching. Then the sound of prayer drifts across the dawn. It's Muslim, Jew, and Christian all mingled.*** *– Rumi*

But this "one song" is more than an idea or an insight. It's an opening, an embracing, a letting go, a feeling. A taste. Which is probably why Rumi's poetry was always spread as song. It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing. It is also why the newest *Illuminated Rumi* also offers a CD of songs by *The Illumination Band*,

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whose members had the great insight to recognize that that traditional American folk forms of Appalachian/blues/gospel music are a perfect vehicle to convey the soul-longing of Rumi's poetry. It is the joining of two great rivers; because the carrier wave is so familiar to our ears, there's no distancing the message. Coleman calls the music "Down home and transcendent."

The Illumination Band is comprised of old friends who are also old pros, and my son Kabir, who gets in a lick or two and lends a note of generational grace to the mix. The band has been playing around the country for a couple of years now. No matter how much work goes into putting a song together, when it is finally performed, there's a deep sense that we're just a delivery system for something a lot bigger than us, and audiences always seem to get it.

The same applies to the art in the book. It comes via the Michelangelo school of art. Michelangelo was once introduced as a great sculptor. "I'm not a sculptor," he said, "but sometimes I look at a block of stone and see a figure inside. All I do is remove what doesn't belong and set it free." The best of what I do seems to be an act of discovery, of setting something free. When I do a book, I work a lot with the digital format, a medium with this terrific fluidity and forgiveness of "What if this, what if that?" It lets me doodle and fish around until I recognize something. If things go well, that something starts to have an echo-like quality, a presence that I home into.

I'm not exactly a huge fan of digital technology. But while it has its hidden costs, it does seem to afford one the magical powers to access and utilize the entire body of human esthetic/spiritual achievement, and to create marriages that are virtually shamanic between wildly diverse source materials. I'm able to take a traditional Krishna and drop him into that 18th century *Peaceable Kingdom* painting by Edward Hicks. And doesn't it look just about right! I could have just drawn the images myself, and I do elsewhere in the book, but my drawing would have diluted the alchemy of allowing the actual images and cultures to interact. Somehow, I feel this is authentic to Rumi, to the "mingling."

Coleman loves that mingling too. "Rumi reminds us," he says, "of the radiant depth inside that is present in grief and in love, in being ecstatically here in the moment. What he celebrates has many names: the soul, Buddha nature, the person of Christ, the nur, and Rumi praises them all at one table. There is no quarrel about names or scriptures in Rumi. His work does not divide; it includes, and that is a blessing in these sectarian days. Rumi represents a nourishing exchange for both the East and the West, as the Silk Road was in his day, when the beauty of the great religions, and the storytellers, poets, and their music, flowed together and created a new and vibrant fusion."

Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, who was also a Sufi, was once asked what his religion was. "Whatever religion God is, that's my religion," he replied

Creating these books is a big experiment, a public act of intimacy. What I hope I am doing is returning to the initiatory origins of art – art as catalyst for sacred perception – and bringing the traditional approach of illumination into a new dimension. I once heard of a book entitled *The Re-enchantment of Art*. What a great phrase. If it's a movement, count me in.

Michael Green's latest work, One Song – A New Illuminated Rumi *(Running Press) is a powerful collaboration between word, image, and music. His art can be viewed and purchased at www.michaelgreenarts.com. He is presently working on a large-scale exhibit to accompany the band.* The Illumination Band*'s music can be streamed at www.rumibook.info*

First World Rumi Day

On December 17, Visionary Media Inc. and Radiant Media Inc., in association with VisionTV, launch the first ever World Rumi Day and invite community groups to host benefit screenings of the new docudrama *Rumi – Turning Ecstatic*. This day of devotion, remembrance, and hope for peace celebrates the life and legacy of 13th century Sufi poet and mystic Mevlana Jelalludin Rumi.

December 17 has long been a day of celebration in the Middle East, where Rumi is recognized as a visionary peacekeeper and environmentalist, who promoted tolerance, compassion, and understanding between people of all backgrounds and beliefs. It is held sacred as the anniversary of Rumi's passing, widely known as his "wedding day."

Rumi – Turning Ecstatic is a labour of love for producers Tina Petrova and Stephen Roloff. The film retraces Petrova's spiritual journey over the past five years, an experience that began with a tragic car crash, and ended with the wondrous discovery of Rumi and the many scholars around the world who illuminate his works today.

Organize a DVD fundraising screening of *Rumi – Turning Ecstatic* on December 17 at the venue of your choice to benefit your church, school, university, study group, or circle of friends. As an event organizer, you will be entitled to retain 50 percent of ticket revenues for your group. For information, contact Marissa Ponokowski, Rumi Day coordinator, 416-368-3194, or email rumi@visiontv.ca. Visit www.rumi-turningecstatic.com and www.visiontv.ca

Vancouver celebrates Rumi

Rumi Night – The Rumi Society of Vancouver gathers Saturday, December 17 for an intimate evening of sema (whirling), poetry and zikr (chanting). Email jbrozak@telus.net for more information and to RSVP. Donations accepted. www.vcn.bc.ca/rumi/RUMIPG1.HTM

Ongoing Rumi events – Dr. Parviz Sahabi, a Persian master who has spent his life studying and teaching Rumi's works, teaches ongoing classes in English and Persian on Rumi's opus *Masnavi*. Persian classes are offered from 7-9 pm on the first three Tuesdays of the month. English classes meet from 6:30-9 pm on the first three Thursdays of the month. Meet at the Electra Building, M44-970 Burrard Street, Vancouver. Buzzer #044, 604-683-1044. Please enter by the door close to the Scotia Bank building on Burrard Street. First class is free. Subsequent classes cost $25 per evening.

A class in whirling and unity zikr (chanting) take place on the last Friday of each month at the Quaker Hall, 1090 West 70th Avenue, Vancouver, 7 pm.

Trek to Turkey – Several members of Vancouver's local dervish community will be in Turkey from December 10 to 23 for the celebration of the Urs of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi. For more information, email Jem Williford at yahu@aol.com. Check out the following links:
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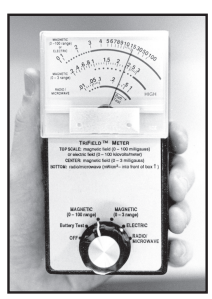
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You are not your problems

THE POWER OF NOW

by Eckhart Tolle

The problems of the mind cannot be solved on the level of the mind. Once you have understood the basic dysfunction, there isn't really much else you need to learn or understand. Studying the complexities of the mind may make you a good psychologist, but doing so won't take you beyond the mind, just as the study of madness isn't enough to create sanity. You have already understood the basic mechanics of the unconscious state: identification with the mind, which creates a false self, the ego, as a substitute for your true self rooted in Being. As Jesus said, you become as a "…branch cut off from the vine."

The ego's needs are endless. It feels vulnerable and threatened, and thus lives in a state of fear and want. Once you know how the basic dysfunction operates, there is no need to explore all its countless manifestations, no need to make it into a complex, personal problem. The ego, of course, loves that. It is always seeking something to which it can attach, in order to uphold and strengthen its illusory sense of self, and it will readily attach itself to your problems. This is why, for so many people, a large part of their sense of self is intimately connected with their problems. Once this has happened, the last thing people want is to become free of their problems; that would mean the loss of self. There can be a great deal of unconscious ego investment in pain and suffering.

Once you recognize the root of unconsciousness as identi-fication with the mind, which of course includes the emotions, you step out of it. You become present. When you are present, you can allow the mind to be as it is without getting entangled. The mind, in itself, is not dysfunctional. It is a wonderful tool. Dysfunction sets in when you seek your self in it and mistake it for who you are.

Studying the complexities of the mind may make you a good psychologist, but doing so won't take you beyond the mind, just as the study of madness isn't enough to create sanity.

It then becomes the egoic mind and takes over your whole life.

End the delusion of time

It seems almost impossible to disidentify from the mind. We are all immersed in it. How do you teach a fish to fly? Here is the key: end the delusion of time. Time and mind are inseparable. Remove time from the mind and it stops, unless you choose to use it.

To be identified with your mind is to be trapped in time: the compulsion to live almost exclusively through memory and anticipation. This creates an endless preoccupation with past and future and an unwillingness to honour and acknowledge the present moment and allow it to be. The compulsion arises because the past gives you an identity and the future holds the promise of salvation, of fulfillment, in whatever form. Both are illusions.

You may be thinking: "Without a sense of time, how would we function in this world? There would be no goals to strive toward. I wouldn't even know who I am, because my past makes me who I am today. I think time is something very precious, and we need to learn to use it wisely rather than waste it." Time isn't precious at all, because it is an illusion. What you perceive as precious is not time, but the one point that is out of time: the Now. That is precious indeed. The more you are focused on time, past and future, the more you miss the Now, the most precious thing there is.

Why is it the most precious thing? Firstly, because it is the only thing. It's all there is. The eternal present is the space within which your whole life unfolds, the one factor that remains constant. Life is now. There was never a time when your life was not now, nor will there ever be. Secondly, the Now is the only point that can take you beyond the limited confines of the mind. It is your only point of access into the timeless and formless realm of Being.

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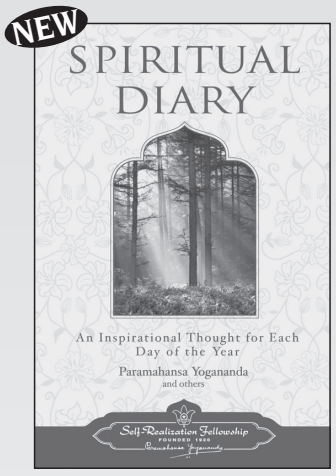

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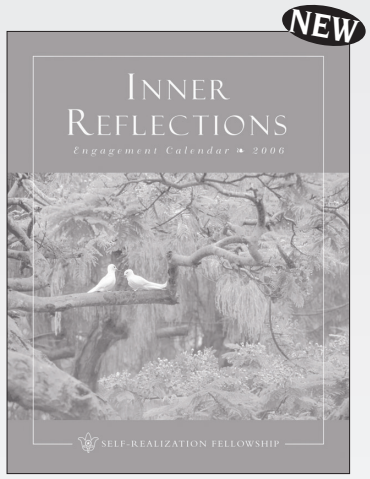

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UNIVERSE WITHIN *by Gwen Randall-Young*

The recent hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and terrorist attacks – and hype about a possible flu pandemic – may make us feel we are living in dangerous times. Even if we have not been directly affected, we have seen our fellow humans endure the unimaginable.

Our bubble of security could easily burst. The solid ground of our lives may begin to feel more like thin ice. If we are grounded and centred in the personal world of our own construction, who will we be when some unexpected event results in its deconstruction?

As much as we may firmly believe in the illusion that we are in control of our lives, we do not know which one of our many possible futures will play out. Ego could be in for a shock, or even collapse, if its defining aspects are suddenly non-existent: loss of our job, home, community, or city; our health becomes unstable; or we lose our loved ones. It is as if these aspects are the pillars that hold ego aloft, and should even one of them fall, the whole ego-structure may crash.

... we can release our attachment before it is wrenched from our grasp.

Attachment is the problem. If we are attached to the world being a certain way, we are probably not working on a plan to sustain ourselves should things go awry. I am reminded of a dear friend, who was about to undergo chemotherapy. She had lovely, long, blonde hair, and knew it would likely begin falling out in clumps. Realizing that the loss would be difficult to deal with, she cut her hair very short before she began her treatments. Because she let go of it before it was gone, she was prepared when what little was left began to go.

Buddhism teaches about the suffering caused by attachment. The more attached we are, the more we suffer when we lose something. It was interesting to see the reactions of some of the very poor that were displaced after hurricane Katrina. Within days, some of these people were working at new jobs in Texas and looking for places to live, fully launched into their new lives. For some, the crisis represented a better opportunity. For others, who were already successful and prosperous, and who lost not only a lucrative source of income, but also a social circle and clientele integral to who they were, this was not the case.

How can we develop the resilience and courage to deal with the unknown, should it suddenly appear in a way that shakes our world? Like my friend who underwent chemo, we can release our attachment before it is wrenched from our grasp. Does that mean we let go of anything, or anyone, that is important to us? No, we do not let go of them, only to our attachment to them.

We must acknowledge that everything in life is temporary and transient. Nothing stays the same and there are no guarantees. Eventually, we must let go of everything. We have to think about that once in a while, so that our inner compass keeps pointing in the right direction. We can have mental, mini "fire drills," where we imagine a plan that would allow us to cope with a potentially huge loss or change in our lives. If we develop an alternate life plan to utilize in the event of a crisis – a spouse's death, the loss of a job, or a major health crisis – although we may still be shocked, we need not be dumbfounded.

Much as ego would have it otherwise, our journey here is not all about ego. It is about soul and only soul. It is about learning to get ego out of the way so we can "know" our soul. We come into the world as a naked soul, devoid of any ego trappings, and we leave the same way. If we release our attachment to ego baggage along the way, we are able to respond and adapt to whatever comes.

Knowing this about ourselves, we are free to savour each day of our lives from a love-based, rather than fear-based, perspective. We can be grateful for our blessings, as well as for the strength and courage we know will be there when we need them.

Gwen Randall-Young is an author and psychotherapist in private practice. For additional articles, or information about her books and CDs, visit www.gwen.ca, gwendall@shaw.ca

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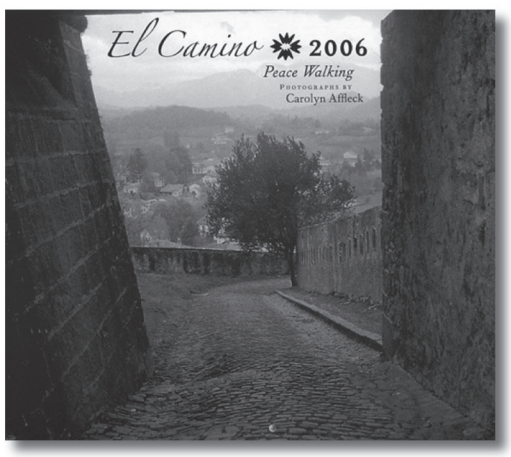

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Healthy eating sea to sky

NUTRISPEAK *by Vesanto Melina MS, RD*

For many of us, winter heralds the pleasure of travel. For some, it is the best season to visit exotic locations and escape from the cold and rain. For others, it's an opportunity to reconnect with distant family members. Work-related projects recently took me to California and Barcelona, Spain, and this month's column was inspired by KLM's strict vegetarian meal, served on my return flight via Amsterdam.

My dinner consisted of roasted eggplant in a delicious sauce, couscous with currants and coriander, a diced beet salad with endive, and fresh fruit slices (pineapple, grapefruit, and kiwi) with a fruit sauce for dessert. Not bad for an airline.

...in the wake of increased airline security since 9/11, I once had my small, plastic fork confiscated before boarding a Hawaiian airliner, after which the airline supplied me with an identical plastic fork for its in-flight snack.

Whether you are a vegetarian, vegan, or raw food enthusiast, or you have food sensitivities, or you simply want to enjoy healthy meals during your travels, a little pre-planning will help you meet your food requirements, wherever you go. Here are some pointers:

1. Specify food preferences in advance

Pack your own healthy lunch for short flights; on longer flights, most airlines offer a meal service that caters to special needs. You can request several types of vegetarian diets and order an appropriate meal for your food sensitivities. Whether you are travelling by train, plane, or cruise ship, discuss food restrictions when you book your journey. You will often be pleasantly surprised at how well these companies take care of you.

2. Research the internet

Conduct some internet research to find food establishments along your travel route and at your destination. Vegetarian restaurants typically serve meals that are free of fish, dairy, eggs, animal products, and gluten-free grains. These establishments can accommodate a wide variety of health conditions, including diabetes, heart conditions, and other chronic diseases. Visit www.vegdining.com, www.happycow.com, and www.ivu.org, and also check out some sites related to food allergies.

Before you arrive you may wish to contact restaurants , via phone or email, to explain your limitations and to ask whether they are equipped to accommodate your needs.

3. Check out the food guides

The Vegetarian Journal's Guide to Natural Food Restaurants in the U.S. and Canada is handy during road trips (www.vrg.org). For information about vegetarian restaurants in Europe, visit www.vegetarianguides.co.uk. Our books, *Becoming Vegetarian, Becoming Vegan,* and *Raising Vegetarian Children* all include travel sections, as does the *Food Allergy Survival Guide*. (Available at Banyen, Chapters, and Amazon.com.)

4. Pack some containers

It can be immensely helpful to purchase a few spill-proof containers in suitable sizes for a serving of vegetable or bean salad, hummus, salad dressing, nut butters, or a non-dairy beverage to round out the foods available enroute. You may want to bring a plastic fork and spoon. (To my amusement, in the wake of increased airline security since 9/11, I once had my small, plastic fork confiscated before boarding a Hawaiian airliner, after which the airline supplied me with an identical plastic fork for its in-flight snack.)

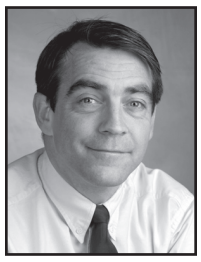
Certain foods pack well for travel. Combine your favourite nuts and dried fruits to create a nourishing, and even exotic, trail mix. Bring small packages of non-dairy milk, although cereals, granola, and muesli also taste good with fruit juice. You'll find delicious, fresh juices in airports throughout Europe and even in the departures area of our own Vancouver airport. For a protein boost, reconstitute individual portions of instant soup mix (black bean, lentil, or curry) with hot water. Mix ready-to-eat tofu with a little seasoning and chopped, raw veggies to make a dip or sandwich filling. When food foraging is challenging, add a multivitamin mineral supplement.

5. Plan your exercise program

Fitness profoundly affects how we feel, so it's wise to include it in your plans. When I travel as a speaker or am visiting, I advise my hosts that I prefer to include an hour of exercise every day; I inquire about the proximity of beautiful parks, swimming pools, and recreational facilities. Fitness becomes a rich and integral part of our itinerary. In Barcelona, in addition to visiting a Gaudi park, we toured an interactive playground with an immense xylophone that allowed children and adults to leap from note to note, teeter-totters that triggered fountain sprays, and unique merry-go-rounds.

Travel in good health and bon voyage.

Vesanto Melina is a BC-based registered dietitian and author of a number of best-selling books about food and nutrition. For personal consultations, call 604-888-8325 (Fort Integrated Health Clinic) or 604-882-6782 (home office, near Fort Langley) www.nutrispeak.com



Medicating the male orgasm

HEALTH

DRUG BUST

by Alan Cassels

As someone who frequently lectures on pharmaceutical issues, I learned very early that no discussion of prescription drugs is complete without at least one Viagra joke. "Did you hear the one about Viagra being marketed in liquid form? Now it's truly possible for a man to pour himself a stiff one."

Like Viagra, the next big drug for male sexual difficulties will be a windfall for standup comedy for years to come. You can say you heard it here first. Our thoughtful friends in the drug research labs are about to launch a pill to treat a new and growing condition that affects up to 40 percent of the male population. Yes, I'm talking about premature ejaculation (PE) the hottest new disease to hit the comedy stage. But just wait.

It seems the makers of this newest treatment for PE may have suffered a bit from premature enthusiasm in the eyes of drug regulators. Just last month, the US FDA told drug maker Johnson & Johnson that dapoxetine, its exciting, new, experimental premature ejaculation (PE) drug was "not approvable." J&J maintained that dapoxetine "…increased intra-vaginal ejaculatory latency (IEL) time" better than a placebo, and pointed to two, 12-week, phase three, randomized, placebo-controlled studies involving about 2,600 men between the ages of 18 and 77. The FDA said there was insufficient data to prove the drug's worth and sent the company back to the drawing board.

Ouch, that hurt. As J&J shares slid downward, the financial analysts scuttled back to their cubicles to revise the company's now less than "shagarific" financial projections. More clinical trials are probably necessary, which can be costly. Undaunted, the company promised it would be back to try again, possibly next year. And it will have plenty of company.

Dapoxetine, you see, had the financial whiz boys mighty excited, because the potential PE market is not only massive, but also malleable. Could be that as many as 30 to 40 percent of us guys are "sufferers," and in need of treatment. The market for erectile dysfunction drugs, made so popular by Pfizer's "Riser" Viagra – Hugh Hefner's suggestion for the drug's street name – was tiny in comparison, affecting only 10 to 12 percent of the male population.

What is happening, of course, is little more than another crude incarnation of "selling sickness," where drug makers invent a medical condition as a vehicle to tout their expensive, newly patented drugs that then sail in to the rescue.

So, even though it's long been known that Prozac-like drugs delay ejaculation – not to mention they also dampen sexual interest – what is different here is the brazen way companies tap into the side effect of a chemical entity to create a brand new market. Loss of sexual interest and delayed orgasm in men are well-known side effects of the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), which include Paxil (paroxetine), Zoloft (sertraline), Prozac (fluoxetine) and Luvox, (fluvoxamine). Dapoxetine, which is not approved as an antidepressant, is basically one of this crowd.

Anecdotally, we've known about these side effects for years. One of my friends, who jokes about her overactive libido, tells me that one of the key features of her Zoloft, is that it "brings her back to normal," in terms of how often she wants to shag her husband. Seems he's not arguing, as her decreased sexual desire means he can get more done around the house. In one study of the sexual side effects of SSRIs, 58 percent of patients admitted to experiencing at least one of these side effects: decreased libido, delayed orgasm, delayed ejaculation, inability to ejaculate, or impotence.

If you don't like the erection ads, be prepared. Ejaculation is next. Premature ejaculation is something that's going to get hot in the coming years.

– Dr. John Grantmyre, Dalhousie University

But how can we ever define the "premature" in premature ejaculation? Let's face it, there are likely some men, at the extreme end of the spectrum, who are a little trigger-happy, and whose guns go off before they can draw them from the holster. Those guys might indeed benefit from pharmaceutical enhancement, but can we fool ourselves that such treatment will be reserved for them alone?

The FDA said there was insufficient data to prove the drug's worth... as J&J shares slid downward... financial analysts scuttled back to their cubicles to revise financial projections.

Of course not. The marketing will be intense, with ads targeting every man in the world, regardless of their staying power. With marketing campaigns posing the question, "Wouldn't you like to go a little longer?" who could say no?

The kicker, of course, is that only men will be asked that question. What about their partners? Maybe the concept of premature, be it 30 seconds, five minutes, or half an hour, rests in the eye of the beholder. And maybe what a guy thinks is premature may be just about right for his partner. Doesn't matter. Already, several companies are queuing up to conduct clinical trials of their short-acting SSRI clones. Others are considering resurrecting older drugs to see if they may have some effect on ejaculation latency. Indeed, as the chemists work the labs, the marketers are creating a brave new world of PE advertising, because as every ad man knows, "You don't sell the steak, you sell the sizzle."

Dr. John Grantmyre, an urologist at Dalhousie University in Halifax has noted: "If you don't like the erection ads, be prepared. Ejaculation is next." According to Grantmyre, "Premature ejaculation is something that's going to get hot in the coming years."

So what's a guy to do if he wants relief from this condition and a drug has yet to be approved? According to studies in this area, the main SSRIs available right now – paroxetine (Paxil), fluoxetine (Prozac), and sertraline (Zoloft) – have all been shown to delay ejaculation. But don't expect your doctor to prescribe these drugs for that reason, as that would constitute "off-label" prescribing, a practice of prescribing drugs for uses not approved by the drug regulator. Evidence, not anecdote, is what should guide drug treatment, and "off label prescribing" is what we researchers call prescribing in an "evidence-free" zone.

At the end of the day, any man who wants to use an SSRI, for whatever reason, should do so with a high level of informed consent. Again, read everything you can from non-industry funded sources about the pros and cons of SSRIs. Be aware of the potential adverse side effects, such as withdrawal symptoms, and effects that span the range from common, but mildly annoying, to rare, but life altering. Know that there is a growing awareness that some people taking SSRIs may be at increased risk of suicide or suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts).

It would be a shame if, in order to last a little longer in bed, you were led down a road that hastened your death.

Resources: worstpills.org is researched, written, and maintained by Public Citizen's Health Research Group, a division of Public Citizen. Public Citizen is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public interest group founded in 1971 to represent consumer interests.

Alan Cassels is the co-author of Selling Sickness: How the World's Largest Pharmaceutical Companies Are Turning Us All Into Patients, *Greystone Books.*

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Fair trade is a better deal

COMMERCIAL DRIVE LEADS THE WAY

by Sean Osborne

Fair trade is a movement that promotes a fair deal for producers in developing countries. With more than 300 stores and businesses linking Commercial Drive, 17 of these are already selling fair trade products, exceeding the criteria set out by the International Fair Trade Labelling Organization to pronounce itself a fair trade town. (www.flo/fairtradetowninititaive.org). Fairtradedrive.org is vying to have Commercial Drive officially proclaimed North America's first fair trade zone, aligning our community with the growing international ethical trade and justice movement.

Bruce Macdonald, fair trade co-ordinator.

Am I afraid of high notes? Of course I am afraid. What sane man is not?
– Luciano Pavarotti

Vancouver may need to sing falsetto to live up to its most liveable city in the world label. Despite glowing reviews, the city may not be taking full advantage of its reputation on the international stage. Could Vancouver enhance its potential by becoming the first North American example of a fair trade city? We need to take the first step, by convincing our new city council to get beyond the fear of fairness. Commercial Drive wants to be proclaimed a fair trade zone.

Bruce Macdonald, co-coordinator for fairtradedrive.org explains: "We canvassed 60 Commercial Drive businesses to participate in this initiative. Within this sample, we received a 78 percent approval rating, indicating a strong basis for creating a fair trade zone. We took this opportunity to encourage local merchants to sell or use at least one fair trade product. We also received an incredible response from the neighbours and local community, many of whom engage in an ongoing dialogue about fair trade with their local merchants."

A fair trade zone is an opportunity to help build a sustainable community. If Commercial Drive becomes North America's first fair trade zone, we could reach the upper register of conscious choice and build an environment, based on justice and fairness for our shared humanity. As Vancouver gears up for the first-ever sustainable Olympics, it makes sense to demonstrate to the world that we have the will and the character as a neighbourhood, and as a city, to demonstrate what we are really about: positive global change. Caroline Whitby, executive director of Transfair Canada says, "The idea of a fair trade zone is wonderful in that it provides a storefront for fair trade that allows for flexibility and the participation of a great number of people."

The first step is to build upon what we already have. In addition to the interest shown from local groups such as Grandview Woodlands Area Council, The Commercial Drive Business Improvement Association and community organizations such as Job Start and The Kettle, shops such as the East End Food Coop, Sweet Cherubim, Drive Organics, Eternal Abundance, and companies such as the Fair Trade Chocolate Company, Café Etico, Ten Thousand Villages, Ethical Bean, and Spud.ca, we have also found support from politicians at all three levels of government.

Tim Louis, a passionate supporter of fair trade, has brought the initiative up with council (Tim was instrumental in the realization of the city's ethical purchasing policy), Shane Simpson (environment critic for the NDP) has offered his support and encouragement, while Libby Davies, our MP for East Vancouver, has been a long-time champion for the cause. Libby's father, a founding member of Bridgehead Coffee, one of the very first fair trade efforts in Canada has noted, "The fair trade Drive helps neighbours care about fair trade and encourages local merchants to carry and promote fair trade products." Recently, at a local breakfast joint, I bumped into Ben West, a mayoral candidate in the recent election and leader of the Work Less Party. West, who has been involved with ethical purchasing initiatives and corporate responsibility issues, echoed the enthusiasm behind this grass-root project: "I think this is fantastic, the best thing to happen to the Drive in a long time."

Despite an incredibly positive outlook from all those concerned, there are some concerns. For some merchants, the idea of a fair trade zone along Commercial Drive might seem like an imposition. After all, who would dare suggest that any hard-working, family-run business could be anything less than fair? So many of the businesses that grace Commercial Drive have grown from independent roots and immigrant perseverance; even the hint of a suggestion that their businesses ought to be more "fair" can seem like interference or, at best, an ideological flight of fancy.

As Vancouver gears up for the first-ever sustainable Olympics, it makes sense to demonstrate to the world that we have the will and the character as a neighbourhood, and as a city, to demonstrate what we are really about: positive global change.

Other worries appear in questions, such as: "Will a fair trade zone mean that nobody is allowed to sell anything that is not fair trade?" The word "zone" sounds prohibitive in some way, but, in fact, the objective of a fair trade zone is to shed light on the latent power in our collective pockets. Many consumers have already set their sights on the ethical high ground, slinging their coins past corporate giants that stand in the way of a balanced approach to the environment and the economy. Bruce Macdonald, who is also a historian and activist, continues: "Democracy has become dysfunctional, but fair trade allows us to vote directly with our money." Indeed, the giants must hear the occasional ping whizzing past their collective, global ear.

Since November 1, the junk food behemoth McDonalds has been selling fair trade coffee at 658 of its restaurants in New England and Albany, New York. Usually, these types of initiatives provoke scorn and accusations of hypocrisy, but large-scale efforts to integrate ethical sources into big business are exactly the type of positive developments most fair trade activists hope for, winning praise from groups such as Oxfam America. Though there are obvious contradictions when large players get on board, every gain leads to a greater understanding that fair trade is all about win/win, providing further incentive for ethical shoppers to ask the big question: "Where is the best place to spend my money?"

Anyone taking a stroll along The Drive can easily see the reason for its reputation as a bohemian village. Characterized by social radicals, environmental activists, and progressive thinkers, the laid-back Drive scene hosts an ethnically diverse range of coffee shops, food cooperatives, restaurants, and boutiques. Here, the multi-cultural ideal of Canada vibrates in a spectrum akin to the rainbow mural that arcs the wall of Joe's Café; it's an area where the blossoming of ethical consumerism is imminent.

Some neighbours have asked: "How can we call ourselves a fair trade zone if not everyone is buying and selling fair trade on the Drive?" The answer lies in the current state of fair trade as a movement and the current availability of fair trade products. As Roxanne Cave, manager of Ten Thousand Villages on Commercial Drive points out, "It is almost exclusively agricultural products that are certified – products like coffee, cocoa, and bananas, but we sell a range of items that include handicrafts and we sell these within the standards set by IFAT." (IFAT is the global network of fair trade organizations, www.ifat.com) Concerned that rhetorical differences between standards and definitions could stand in the way of allowing fair trade to flourish, Cave is adamant that the most important principle is whether or not the producer is indeed receiving a fair price for their efforts. "It is not right to make claims of fair trade just because you have gone and met the producer; a substantial benefit needs to be demonstrated."

Basically, fair trade products fall under two broad categories: "Certified fair trade" and "fairly traded." For those new to fair trade, the difference may seem irrelevant, but the distinction is part of an ongoing dialogue that is shaping the fair trade movement. The best way to explain it is to compare it to the organic food industry; without regulation of some sort, it is difficult to verify claims of authenticity. In a similar way, fair trade certification ensures that the entire supply chain is on board. Based on strict audits, the consumer gains confidence that the extra price of fair trade is being tracked with diligence, that every extra penny spent on a fair trade cup of coffee ends up exactly where it is

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Playing with our food

FEW RULES EXIST IN THE GENETIC ENGINEERING GAME

by Pat Howard PhD

Since 1995, I have studied the scientific debates regarding the potential hazards of genetically modified plants, animals, and micro-organisms. The concerns expressed by ecologists, agronomists, microbiologists, veterinarians, physicians, toxicologists, and immunologists in the scientific literature are considerable. Coverage in the media, on the other hand, has been very inadequate.

The one study that received a brief flurry of media coverage was conducted by a research team in Scotland, led by Dr. Arpad Pusztai, an international expert on lectins, which are insecticidal molecules produced by plants. In 1995, Pusztai's team received a $3.2 million research grant to investigate the safety of genetically engineered potatoes producing such an insecticidal molecule. Pusztai had already spent six years studying this lectin. He had fed it to rats in very large quantities without any deleterious effects. He did not expect to uncover any health hazards.

The rat-feeding study was meticulously designed to maximize the reliability of the findings. One group of rats ate the genetically modified potatoes, a control group consumed unmodified potatoes, and a third group ate unmodified potatoes laced with the lectin. To everyone's surprise, the rats that ate the genetically modified potatoes suffered serious health effects. The study used young, growing rats.

After only 10 days, a significant number of the rats that ate the GM potatoes showed signs of arrested development of their livers, testicles, and brains. Some suffered damage to the thymus and spleen, which are both crucial to immune system function. The rats' white blood cells also appeared to have been affected. The cells lining their stomachs and intestines had begun to proliferate and undergo structural change, an ominous sign of the possibility of an increased risk of cancer. The feeding continued for 110 days, the equivalent of the first 10 years of a child's life.

To rule out any other causes, the researchers repeated the tests with boiled, baked, and raw potatoes and varied the amount of food and percentage of protein. The results were consistent; the GM potatoes alone damaged the young rats' organs and immune systems. On October 16, 1999, *The Lancet* reported the study. Pusztai, however, went public with his findings before publication in this peer-reviewed journal. He appeared on television and expressed his concern for the public, which was already eating genetically modified potatoes, tomatoes, corn products, and soy. He was subsequently fired and his computer and research data confiscated. He and his colleague Stanley Ewen later obtained all the data and published their analysis in Britain's most prestigious medical journal.

Boxes of signatures from people rejecting GM foods

Since the lectin did not damage the rats' organs and immune systems, what did? Is there something about the genetic modification process itself that makes the feed immunogenic, toxic, or carcinogenic? Feeding studies involving rats, mice, pigs, and cows, conducted in Mexico, Brazil, Cuba, Japan, Egypt, Slovenia, and Russia have produced comparable, negative health effects. In fact, a rat-feeding study of the first commercial GMO, the FlavorSavr tomato, also revealed lesions that caused FDA scientists to protest the agency's approval of the product in 1994.

How do genetic engineers manage to get foreign DNA into the genome of a host plant and enable the plant to utilize it to produce proteins that confer the ability to tolerate a particular herbicide or antibiotic, or to kill insect pests? The fact is that they exploit the infectious capacities of viruses and bacteria. One commonly used vector is a soil bacterium, a plant pathogen that causes galls or tumours. Only the DNA coding for proteins involved in inducing tumours is used. It is taken from a plasmid; plasmids are small, free-floating circles of DNA that provide bacteria a greater capacity to deal with environmental changes than any other life form. They are able to exchange and share plasmids, which contain genes for adaptive capacities. This is how they spread antibiotic resistance. There is evidence that antibiotics may function as sex hormones stimulating gene transfer via the exchange of plasmids, among even different species of promiscuous bacteria.

Genetic engineers open up plasmids and insert a set of genes borrowed from other species. The ideal transformation would incorporate one copy of the foreign gene set into the genome of the host plant's cells. However, this is rarely, if ever, what actually occurs. Most of the approved commercial varieties have either only a portion of the foreign DNA that was successfully transferred, or multiple copies of the desired transgenic DNA. Recent research, after regulatory approval, has revealed that unintended bits of bacterial DNA are frequently incorporated, which may result in deletions, multiplications, or movements of the host plant's DNA.

The transformed configuration of DNA that characterizes the transgenic plant's genome is called the transformation event. After a long struggle in Europe, regulators now require this information from applicants seeking approval for the sale and growth of transgenic varieties. Many of the varieties currently being analyzed by European scientists are turning out to be other than what they are supposed to be.

In 2003, government scientists in France reported on studies of five transgenic crops: Monsanto's Round-up Ready soybeans and four Bt insecticidal corn varieties. All five transgenic lines had inserted foreign DNA, whose structure was no longer the same as was originally reported by the company.

Not only were the inserted genes rearranged, but the plants' own genomes had also been scrambled around the insertion site. Belgian scientists also conducted similar studies that turned up comparable evidence of DNA scrambling. This signifies that the precise varieties evolving in fields in Canada, the US, China, Argentina, Australia, the Philippines, and elsewhere have not been tested for potential

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The European Food Safety Authority has also recommended that no crops containing antibiotic resistance marker genes be approved anywhere in Europe. Many of the crops growing in Canada carry these antibiotic resistance genes in every cell of the plant.

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Support a GMO-free BC

THE ORGANIC WAY *by Marya Skrypiczajko*

Again and again, polls indicate that Canadians are opposed to genetically engineered foods for a number of reasons: no long-term testing has been done on humans who consume GE foods; it is hazardous to the preservation of biodiversity in general; it contaminates ancient varieties of food crops in particular; and it allows for the corporate control of agriculture, meaning that seeds can be patented, which strips farmers of their right to save seeds from their own crops.

Despite this body of evidence, the Canadian government has supported the biotech industry for more than 20 years by allowing the industry to test-grow GE seeds in Canada, and by promoting the message that GE foods are safe to eat; the government has never agreed to the mandatory labelling of GE products, thereby effectively eliminating consumers' right to choose.

Well, biotech firms beware! A grassroots campaign to declare municipalities and regional districts GE-free is growing across BC. Although still in its infancy, the movement is receiving widespread support from farmers, environmentalists, food democracy advocates, organic businesses, and the Council of Canadians. Inspired by Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser, who was sued by biotech giant Monsanto for purportedly growing the company's patented seed on his land illegally, when it had, in fact, blown into his ditch and self-propagated, movement supporters are working municipality by municipality to prevent this from ever happening to BC's farmers.

GE-free crop zones will ensure that regions remain free of any propagation or cultivation of genetically engineered organisms by individuals, farms, or agricultural corporations. The Powell River Regional District was the first region in Canada to pass such a declaration of policy, when it defined Powell River and the surrounding area as GE-free in June 2004. This is a red flag to anyone who may be interested in growing genetically engineered foods in the Powell River area; it clearly demonstrates that they are unwelcome.

The process in Powell River began when a group of concerned farmers approached their regional district board. Luckily for the farmers, both the local government and the community were receptive, and after taking a closer look at the facts surrounding genetic engineering, the regional board took a stand against GE and designated the area GE-free to protect the local, agricultural economy.

As a result, organic and conventional farmers in the Powell River area now have a market advantage. Their crops are not vulnerable to contamination by genetically engineered crops on nearby farms, nor do they risk losing their organic status because a conventional farm is growing GE seed in adjacent fields. This is significant because there is zero tolerance for GE products in much of the world's agriculture market.

The Canadian government has supported the biotech industry for more than twenty years by allowing the industry to test-grow GE seeds in Canada, and by promoting the message that GE foods are safe to eat.

The GE-free Canada campaign was launched in June 2005. In BC, the Council of Canadians hopes to help 20 municipalities across BC and the Yukon declare themselves GE-free within the next few years. The Coalition for a GE-Free BC is a volunteer organization with a diverse group of supporters, including Farm Folk City Folk, Small Potatoes Urban Delivery, Oxfam, members of the Slow Food movement, and many individuals from across BC and the Yukon.

The Council of Canadians currently steers the province-wide movement and helps local chapters become established enough to run successful regional campaigns. In addition to raising awareness about the movement, the coalition helps foster regional independence and develops internal structures, which best serve the goal of banning genetic engineering. Committees are being set up to work on getting resolutions passed at the municipal level, develop restaurant outreach, provide education, fundraise, and help businesses be socially responsible.

To get involved, contact your local chapter of the Council of Canadians, or check out the coalition's website at www.gefree-bc.org. There are many opportunities to help local networks with educational campaigns and to lobby local politicians. You can also sign the petition on the website, write to your municipal and regional governments with your concerns, and vote with your dollar by buying locally grown, organic foods.

Marya Skrypiczajko is the author of BC the Organic Way – Where to Find Organic Food in British Columbia. *www.bctheorganicway.com The Council of Canadians is at www.canadians.org*

Hillbilly heroin and Jasmine's crystal death

WISE TEENS

A couple of years ago at *Teensmag*, we published an article warning teens about the serious dangers of experimenting with the synthetic chemical OxyContin, a strong painkiller that is toxic when used for non-medical purposes. Since then, another horror story has emerged. Last October, in the northern Ontario city of Timmins, OxyContin, which is known on the street as "hillbilly heroin," ruined one student and killed two people. The pusher was 18, and his two victims, who both died from an overdose, were only 17 and 19.

The little red pills appear to have been MS Contin, a powerful, timed-release analgesic agent with opiate-mimicking powers and an extremely addictive nature. The pills are supposed to be swallowed whole, but some users grind them up and ingest them as a powder, making them much more toxic. In any event, the two victims ingested some of them, went to sleep and never woke up.

There are several versions of OxyContin; the little red pills noted here represent only one version. It goes without saying that one should steer clear of them. An additional problem is that some of these pills are now being made in underground labs, where impurities and additives make them very unsafe. Again, let us be clear. Your health is important and being alive beats the alternative.

Meth takes Jasmine

by Laura Anne Walton

It's a Saturday afternoon and two sisters, 15-year-old Aimee and her 17-year-old sister Jackie, had their two friends Tara and Jasmine over. After talking about guys for over an hour in Jackie's bedroom, Jackie, Tara, and Jasmine made their way into the livingroom, where Aimee was watching her favourite TV show *Clean Sweep*.

"Hey Aimee," said Jackie. "You wanna go do something?"

"No," said Aimee. "*Clean Sweep* is on." Aimee never misses *Clean Sweep*.

"Why do you even watch that show," asked Jasmine. "It's so boring."

"I think Eric Stromer is hot," said Tara.

"Say, you guys wanna do something new?" Jackie asked, looking at her friends.

"Like what?" asked Tara.

"I don't know; something different?"

"What are you thinking of?" asked Jackie.

A short time later, Jackie, Tara, and Jasmine are back in Jackie's bedroom. Jackie opens a drawer in her jewellery box, and takes out a small bag full of white powder.

"Have either of you tried crystal meth before?"

"No," said Tara. "Never."

"Me neither," said Jasmine.

"The two of you wanna try it?" asked Jackie.

"I don't know," said Tara. "I hear that stuff is dangerous."

"Oh, no, they just say that. I use it all the time and nothing has ever happened to me. I mean, nothing bad. It makes you alert so you can study harder."

"Oh, really?" said Tara.

"Yeah," said Jackie.

"So, you wanna try it?"

"OK," said Tara, "but only a little bit."

Jackie then takes out some straws from her dresser and teacher her friends how to snort the crystal meth. After a couple of snorts, Tara feels that she's had enough and leaves the room. Jasmine and Jackie take a few more snorts, then Jackie leaves the room.

A short time later, Jackie and Tara stopped watching handsome Eric Stromer on *Clean Sweep*. They wondered what Jasmine was up to. They left the living room and went back to Jackie's room to find Jasmine lying on the floor unconscious.

"Oh, my God," cried Tara. "Jasmine!" Tara plunges to the floor.

"Oh, my God! She isn't breathing!" cried Tara.

Jackie looked devastated. She knew Jasmine had most likely overdosed on the crystal meth. She immediately called an ambulance. But unfortunately it was too late. Jasmine had died. Jackie and Tara would never forget that day, especially Jackie. They gave up crystal meth after the incident. What is the point when you lose your friends?

Reprinted with permission from Teensmag. *Laura Anne Walton, a student at Kelly Road Secondary School in Prince George, BC, won third prize in the 2004* Teensmag *writing competition. Both articles reprinted from* Teensmag*, a publication written by teens about alcohol and drug abuse education and prevention. The editor and publisher is Dr. Merv Mason, a psychologist with many years of experience in alcohol and drug-abuse education and prevention. This publication is a useful resource tool in helping to educate teens against the dangers of substance abuse. It has contributed an important part in drug awareness and prevention education over the past 17 years. It is distributed through corporate sponsorship to BC secondary schools, police detachments, the aboriginal community and substance abuse centres.*

Here are a few places to call for help:
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or email www.youthinbc.com
Alcoholics Anonymous 604-434-3933
Narcotics Anonymous 604-873-1018
Alcohol and drug information lines:
BC 604-660-9382 or 1-800-663-1441
Alberta 1-866-332-2322
Ontario 1-800- 463-6273
Life threatening emergency call 911

Healing in the natural world

EARTHFUTURE.COM *by Guy Dauncey*

Growing up in southern England and Wales, we always lived close to the woods, streams, and hills of the nearby countryside. The towns were built to be dense and tight, so it was relatively easy to walk out of the buildings and away from traffic into a land of kingfishers, beech trees, and marsh marigolds. It was "smart growth" before anyone had invented the term.

Today, I live in a clearing with a small, organic nursery in a recovering, second-growth forest, just north of Victoria. On a typical winter day, we see ravens, tree frogs, a Cooper's hawk, hummingbirds, blue jays, and woodpeckers, as well as worms, spiders, and a host of smaller birds. And, of course, the forest.

In the August 6 issue of *New Scientist*, Joan Maloof, a biology professor at Salisbury University in Maryland, describes how the Japanese have a word to describe the particular air of a forest. They call it shinrin-yoku: "wood-air bathing." Maloof writes: "Japanese researchers have discovered that when diabetic patients walk through the forest, their blood sugar drops to healthier levels. Entire symposiums have been held on the benefits of wood-air bathing and walking."

In a long-term study of the type of wall art typically destroyed by psychiatric patients, while abstract images were often attacked, not once in 15 years had a patient destroyed a picture of a natural scene.

I'm able to enjoy shinrin-yoku all the time, but for those who live in concrete canyons, amidst a soundscape of car alarms and sirens, instead of the croak of frogs and the wind, it has become a distant experience.

In Emily White's article *Greening the Blues*, published in the October issue of *The Ecologist*, White writes about depression and the aspiration of drug companies and their medical colleagues to turn it into a clinical illness that should be treated with drugs. The World Health Organization predicts that by 2020, depression will be second only to heart disease as a cause of disability.

White notes that during her career, she was transferred from a downtown Toronto law firm to a government office in Iqaluit, Baffin Island, in the Arctic. Although she took along her stash of SSRIs to treat her depression, with 24 hours of daylight, she started hiking the tundra, taking photos, and exploring the surrounding world. Her anxiety decreased, her mood improved, and she found herself becoming interested in things. According to White, it wasn't that she was getting more exercise: "It was that the landscape around me was so vibrant and solid that I began to feel that way as well." In her article, she offers some intriguing evidence for one's capacity to heal in a natural environment.

In work with autistic children and people with organic brain diseases, when animals are introduced the subjects have an improved attention span, laugh and talk more, and demonstrate less aggression. When people are shown photos of natural settings, their blood pressure drops, their heart rates fall, their muscles relax, and they report feeling less stressed and anxious. In hospitals, when post-operative patients are given a room with a view of trees, they need fewer painkillers, develop fewer complications, and check themselves out sooner than patients in rooms with an urban view. In a long-term study of the type of wall art typically destroyed by psychiatric patients, while abstract images were often attacked, not once in 15 years had a patient destroyed a picture of a natural scene.

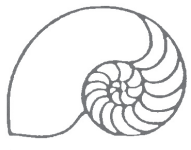
A tropical rainforest in Australia, the lungs of the Earth.

Now, let's return to Joan Maloof's work. As a biologist, she has delved into the science of all of this, and notes that researchers in the Sierra Nevada of northern California have found that the air in the forested mountains contains 120 chemical compounds. Some of these compounds derive from bacteria and fungi in the soil, but most come from the trees, which release them from pockets between their leaf cells. They also produce edible monoterpenes (MT), fragrances, which have been shown to both prevent and cure cancer. When we inhale them, they become part of our bodies, and the forest becomes part of us.

Having evolved along with nature for five million years or so, our bodies and souls are part of nature. There is something within us that longs for the forest and the stream. Until this last, tiny micro-slice of time, we have always lived in close proximity to the animals, Our cities, suburbs, colleges, and schools should offer many more green spaces, trees, and urban farms. The first remedy for depression should be a zoology lift, not Zoloft.

When we attack nature, by clearcutting forests or paving farmland, we attack ourselves. There is a reason why our health care budget is spinning out of control: we are cutting ourselves off from nature's drugs, which are natural and free, and handing the responsibility for our health over to the drug companies, which produce anything but free products.

Guy Dauncey is an author and speaker, who lives in Victoria. He is the editor of EcoNews*, and president of the BC Sustainable Energy Association (www.bcsea.org). Visit his website at www.earthfuture.com*



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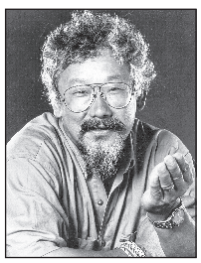

Vampires on the leading edge

SCIENCE MATTERS *by David Suzuki*

"Rabid vampire bats attack Brazilian children" may sound like something out of the tabloid *Weekly World News*, but the headline actually ran in *New Scientist,* a credible and well-respected publication. Even weirder, the headline is true.

Vampire bats have indeed been attacking Brazilian children. In fact, they've bitten more than 1,300 people since September, and 23 of their victims have died from rabies. Beneath the sensational and bizarre story, however, lies more hopeful news about the emerging field of conservation medicine.

Conservation medicine is a relatively new discipline that refers to the convergence of ecology, which looks at species and ecosystems, and health science, which looks at the health of humans, plants, and animals. It's a natural connection because the health of individual plants, animals, and people is intimately connected to the health of the ecosystems in which they are embedded.

What does this have to do with bats? Well, the reason for the recent increase in vampire bat attacks in Brazil is deforestation. The Amazon forests are being cleared for industry and agriculture, especially for grazing animals. With the loss of their homes, the bats are roosting closer to humans and they have a new, plentiful supply of slow-moving, warm-blooded prey: cattle. This has led to larger colonies of bats roosting in smaller areas, an ideal breeding ground for rabies, which makes the bats more aggressive and fearless of humans.

The reason for the recent increase in vampire bat attacks in Brazil is deforestation. The Amazon forests are being cleared for industry and agriculture, especially for grazing animals. With the loss of their homes, the bats are roosting closer to humans.

Rabies is not the only disease that has recently transferred to humans from bats. Bats are also a natural reservoir for SARS, the respiratory virus that caused panic in Toronto and tore through Southeast Asia two years ago. Originally, scientists thought civet cats were the reservoir for SARS, but they now believe bats infected the civets. Often, bats don't eat all of their food. Fruit bats, for example, chew fruit to extract the sugars and then spit out the pulp, which is eaten by foraging animals below.

Scientists now believe that this is how the Nipah virus spread throughout pig farms in Malaysia five years ago, when farms began displacing forests and bats began roosting in barns. Authorities had to kill one million pigs and more than 100 farm workers died from the virus. More recently, in Bangladesh, the Nipah virus spread directly to humans when children picked and sold fruit that had been contaminated with partially digested bat dinners. Researchers also believe fruit dropped by bats may have spread the Hendra virus in Australia and the Ebola virus among primates in Africa.

Before we get out the pitchforks and torches to hunt down these winged terrors, consider what ecologist Andrew Dobson wrote in an analysis in the journal *Science*: "Assuming we can control these diseases by simply controlling bats is both naïve and short sighted. Instead, we must recognize that increased spillover-mediated pathogen transmission from bats to humans may simply reflect an increase in their contact through anthropogenic modification of the bat's natural environment."

In other words, as humans continue to modify and destroy bat habitat, we will continue to run into these problems. To solve them, we must focus on conservation and learning more about bat ecology and immunology, of which we currently know very little. Ultimately, minimizing the conditions that lead to disease outbreak is much more effective than dealing with the problem after it has occurred.

In nature, everything is connected. While people tend to think that human society is somehow excluded from nature – and we are merely observers – we are, in fact, deeply embedded in the natural world. Because of this, our actions can have profound, unforeseen, and mysterious repercussions. The new field of conservation medicine can both help us unlock those mysteries and help us build a healthier world.

Join the Nature Challenge and learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org

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The miracle of mulch

ON THE GARDEN PATH

by Carolyn Herriot

Each week, Carolyn writes about what she is doing in the garden, the orchard, the greenhouse, with seed saving and soil building, with the intention of helping gardeners of all levels realize they can have the most healthy, productive, and beautiful garden without resorting to substances harmful to humans, animals, plants, or the myriad of soil-dwelling organisms.

Mulch is an odd sounding term for layers of organic material that are added to soil. The practice of mulching caught on in the '70s, and it's now de rigueur for conscientious gardeners, who endlessly expound its virtues.

Benefits of mulching:

· There is less water loss from the soil.

· Weed growth is suppressed.

· Plants are protected from soil temperature extremes.

· Mulching helps feed the soil: layers of organic matter gradually break down to form humus, which provides a source of nitrogen and phosphorus, as well as many trace elements.

· It lightens clay-based soils and bulks up sandy soils.

· The soil is protected from wind erosion and plants have an extra blanket of protection throughout the winter.

Mulch materials:

Compost, grass clippings, manure, leaves, wood chips, pine needles, straw, hay, coffee grounds, and even weeds (with no seeds). Technically, non-organic materials, such as landscape fabric, gravel, and rocks can also provide a mulch, but avoid materials that may break down and contaminate the soil, such as black plastic and cedar or treated wood chips.

Required amount:

A three-inch layer of mulch is usually applied. If you want to spread that depth over a 200-square-foot garden, you will need two cubic yards of material, or enough to fill a four-foot-square compost bin. To determine how many full bins of compost you will need to spread a three-inch layer over your garden beds, calculate the square footage of your garden.

When to mulch:

For maximum benefit, mulch garden beds every fall, immediately after the final cleanup, which includes cutting the plants back and weeding. It's the last thing we do in the garden, before putting it to bed for the winter.

As well as increasing biological activity in the soil and providing food for plants, mulch covers weed seeds so they will not germinate. Surveying tidy garden beds covered in a cozy layer of mulch is very satisfying.

Before covering beds with mulch, replace plant labels while you can still identify them. Tomato cages work well for marking bulbs, peonies, and dahlia tubers. Place cages over any areas you wish to remain undisturbed. In hot weather, mulch acts as an insulating barrier, preventing evaporation and locking moisture in the soil. Never mulch when the ground is cold or waterlogged.

Potential problems:

Wood-based mulches, such as sawdust or wood chips, and hay, straw, and leaves can temporarily tie up nitrogen as they start to decompose. Supplementing with additional nitrogen may be necessary if plants show signs of nitrogen deficiency stress, such as yellowing.

Some gardeners fear that damp layers of mulch will provide a breeding ground for bugs and slugs. It's true that insect populations will increase due to the decomposition of the mulch, but, for the most part, these are the good insects that cause your plants no harm, busy at work assisting in breakdown. To avoid attracting slugs in the wet spring, wait until the rains are over and the soil has warmed up. Usually by spring, mulch spread in the fall has broken down to the point that it does not present problems. If fungal problems occur, spread mulch out more thinly, or remove it from under plants to increase air circulation.

Metric conversions:

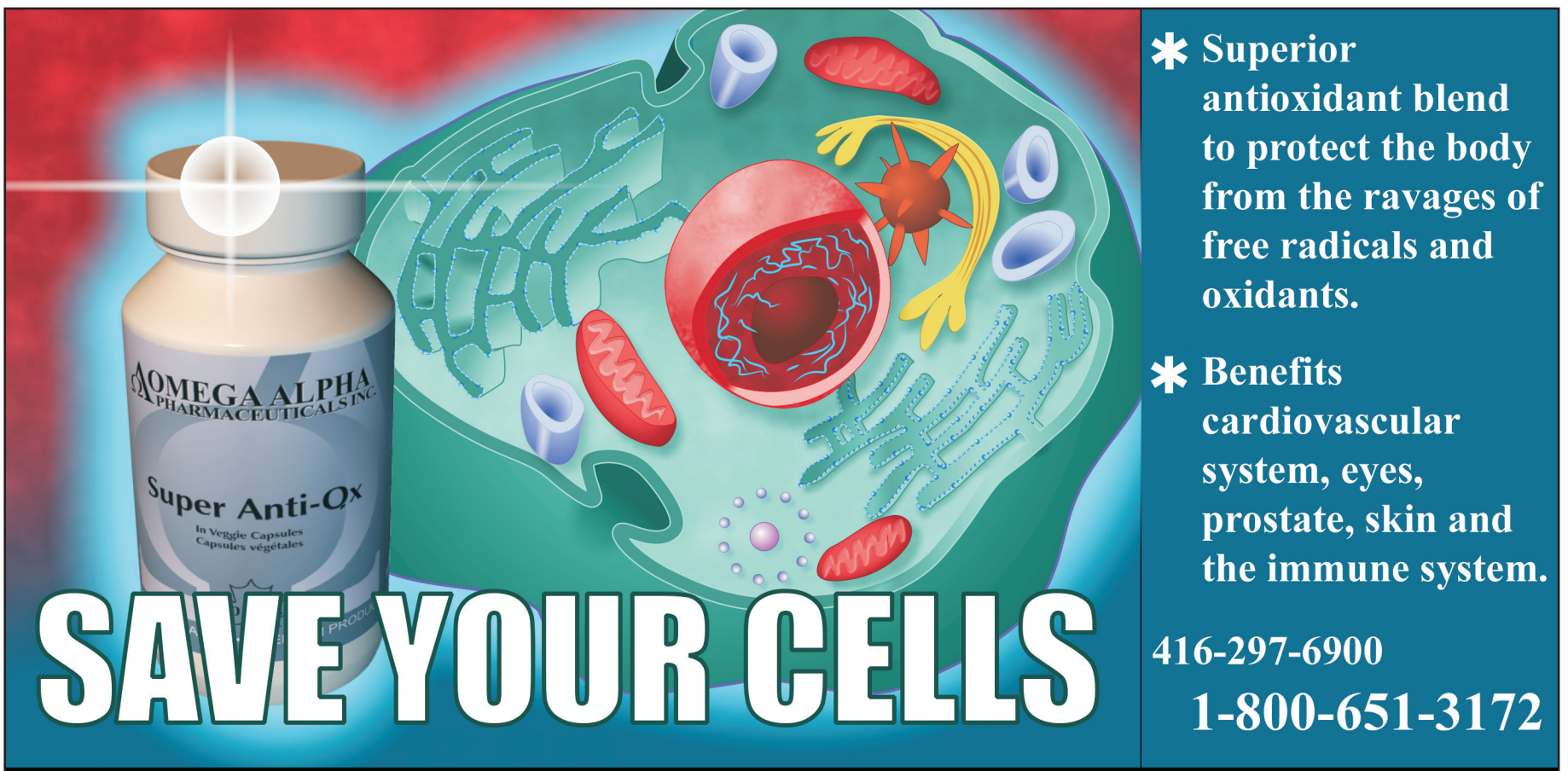
Three inches = 7.6 centimetres

Two hundred square feet = 18.6 square metres

Two cubic yards = 1.53 cubic metres

Four square feet = 1.21 square metres

Adapted from A Year on the Garden Path, A 52-Week Organic Gardening Guide *by Carolyn Herriot. $29.95. Earthfuture Publications, Victoria, BC. Available at Banyen Books, Duthie Books, or at www.earthfuture.com/gardenpath*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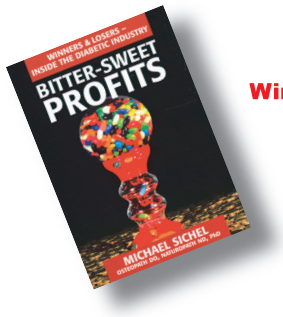

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Newsbites

MORE ON WWW.COMMONGROUND.CA

BC's best organics

The organic industry is the fastest growing segment in Canadian food retailing. In 2003, Canadian organic retail sales were estimated at $1 to $1.3 billion, making Canada the sixth largest market in the world. The first ever Certified Organic Association of British Columbia's BC Organic Harvest Awards, the only event that officially recognizes the growth and accomplishment of the province's organic sector, took place in Vancouver on November 5. Award recipients included:

Nature's Path's Carrot Raisin Manna Bread tied with Artisan Bake Shoppe's Ancient Grains Bread for best bakery product.

Avalon Dairy/Bradner Farms for best dairy producer.

Happy Planet's organic Happiest Orange Juice tied with Ethical Bean's organic coffee for best non-alcoholic beverage.

Kootenay Kitchen Veggie Pate for best-processed (non-livestock) product.

Alderlea Biodynamic Farm for best direct farm marketing business/best integrated farm system.

Bradner Farms for best livestock producer.

Organa Farms Smoked Turkey Bacon for best-processed meat product.

Salt Spring Natureworks for best retailer.

Small Potatoes Urban Delivery for best home-delivery system.

Crannog Ales Backhand of God Stout for best alcoholic beverage.

www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca

No place for a whale

Since July 2005, the Vancouver Aquarium has bought three dolphins and sold one beluga whale. In October 2005, the aquarium imported two more dolphins from Japan, even though the Vancouver park board advised the aquarium not to follow through with those plans. According to park staff, the two dolphins do not meet the city's dolphin bylaw restrictions. The park board sent the matter to the city's legal department for investigation. Historically, every time the city tries to intervene on behalf of whales held captive at the aquarium, the aquarium threatens to sue the city. For more information, visit the Coalition for No Whales in Captivity, www.nowhalesincaptivity.org

Biodiesel hyped as clean fuel

With Vancouver in the running for a 40 million litre per year biodiesel refinery, some serious evaluation needs to be done.

Biodiesel produces half the CO_2 of gasoline and it is a net-zero CO_2 producer. However, beyond that the news is bad.

Biodiesel is being highly diluted with petrodiesel and still being called biodiesel by such users as BC Transit.

Microscopic carbon particles which cause lung cancer come from the incomplete burning of both fuels.

Promotion of biodiesel is extending the life of diesels in general. Diesels are technologically outdated and can never be made environmentally friendly. Cleaner burning fuels such as ethanol plus hydrogen fuel cells and electric are safer and cleaner.

Join the Ban Terminator Campaign

Genetic seed sterilization technology is once again threatening the 12,000-year-old tradition of farmers saving, adapting, and exchanging seed, and the 1.4 billion people who depend on farm-saved seed as their primary seed source. In February 2005, the Canadian government tried to overturn the international UN de facto moratorium on terminator seeds. To meet this new crisis and to rebuild global opposition, the action group Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC) asks you to join the new Ban Terminator Campaign and take action.

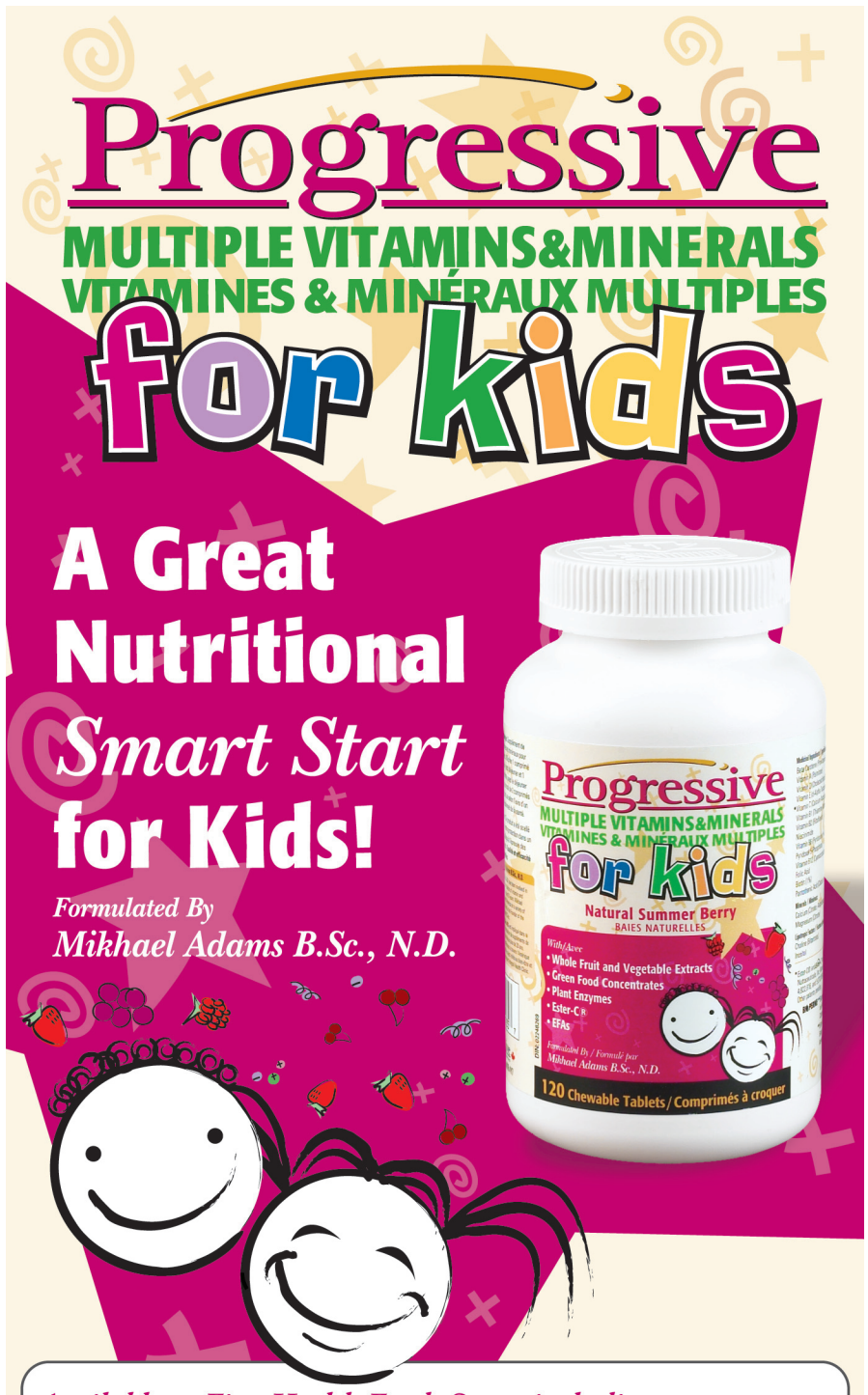
Debates about terminator technology will take place at two upcoming UN meetings. ETC will work to establish a ban on terminator seeds at major meetings of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, January 23-27, 2006 in Spain and March 20-31 in Brazil. Endorse the campaign to show governments how strong the global opposition is. Subscribe to receive action alerts. Join others in your area to pressure your government to ban terminator technology nationally and internationally. The ETC can help provide materials and contacts. Become a Ban Terminator contact and organizer. Share information about terminator seeds in your community. Pass a resolution in your group or community against terminator technology. Visit www.banterminator.org for ideas, information, and campaign materials.

More fruit, fewer veggies

Canadians continue to lay off veggies, but are reaching for more fresh fruit, according to the latest data on food consumption. Per capita consumption of fresh vegetables fell for the third consecutive year in 2004, hitting its lowest level since 1992. On average, Canadians consumed 74.8 kg of fresh vegetables in 2004, down from 75.7 kg in 2003. Even consumption of processed vegetables, including canned and frozen varieties, fell from 15.8 kg to 15.1 kg. Canada's favourite vegetable, potatoes, many of them eaten as French fries or chips, accounted for half of the decline in vegetable consumption. Consumption of potatoes has been trending down for three years. Other Canadian staples such as onions, lettuce, and carrots are also trending lower.

On the other hand, on average, each Canadian ate 37.6 kg of fresh fruit, up from 37.1 kg. Apples, bananas, and oranges remained the fruit of preference, accounting for nearly half of all fresh fruit eaten.

www.statcan.ca



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Remembrances

TWENTY SOMETHING

by Ishi Dinim

Every year I really try to commit to memory the sacrifice of those people who fought for this country. I appreciate that the times they were living in were different, but they all had families and many in my family were amongst them. What's at the root of it all, why do we remember, what are we supposed to think about? I'm torn between feeling pride or disgust; normal people don't want war in their lives.

When is violence OK? It seems so strange to me, a pacifist, to consider that question. Trying to contemplate when I might find it acceptable to hurt or kill another human being seems alien. Beyond self-defence I can't imagine any "good" rationale for resorting to physical violence. Harmful behaviour takes many forms. In its most passive form it is merely benign, in its ugliest instances people end up maimed or dead. What brings a person to the point where they will figure that hurting someone else, or a group of people, is the solution to their problem?

I believe that people's choices result from a chain of previous experiences, education or programming. These choices lead to actions or non-actions based on this chain. I may be over-simplifying how all people operate, but humour my generalization because here I'm really more interested in examining the chain, not the violent act.

There are so many times where being rough and belligerent are supported and rewarded: whether you are an athlete being encouraged to smash your opponent, a politician with a war on drugs, or a soldier with a finger on the trigger. There is no surprise in my mind that these upstanding role models fuel a rage that spills out of their socially sanctioned arenas, into other corners of social life. Why is it OK to fight on an ice rink and not on the street?

Elected officials operate with impunity, all the while telling us to follow the same set of laws they break. Why is murder acceptable on the battlefield, but not in your neighbourhood? I grapple with these double standards, this hypocrisy. Where does the bully learn to intimidate, the thug learn gangsterism, the killer learn bloodlust? I live in a world where violence is celebrated. We're bombarded by conflicting messages. Brutality shifts from right to wrong and back again depending on arbitrary excuses: venue, gender, culture, rank, race, career, news stories, whatever. Essentially because violence is not profoundly forbidden it is acceptable. We allow it to creep into our lives and occasionally openly or secretly revel in its power.

What if we taught non-violence as a course of right living, if as a society we agreed that military was unnecessary and educated people early on to help, not to hurt? If our idea of entertainment shifted from our modern gladiators, horror films, first person shoot-em-ups. I'm not saying we need to pad every sharp corner or eliminate aggressive behaviour, but we need to know where that behaviour comes form and what it might lead to. In our own lives we need to understand our place in conflicts that arise, what part do we play in creating or preventing wars? How do we wish our future societies to develop? Where will we place our emphasis? Will we continue to try to cage violence hoping it won't overflow onto us or can we collectively agree that it has no place any more?

Quotes:

I think the human race needs to think about killing. How much evil must we do in order to do good.

– Robert S. McNamara

I don't believe in killing whatever the reason!

– John Lennon

Any military commander who is honest with himself, or with those he is speaking to, will admit that he has made mistakes in the application of military power. He's killed people – unnecessarily. His own troops or other troops. Through mistakes, through errors of judgement. A hundred, or 1,000, or 10,000, maybe even 100,000. But he hasn't destroyed nations.

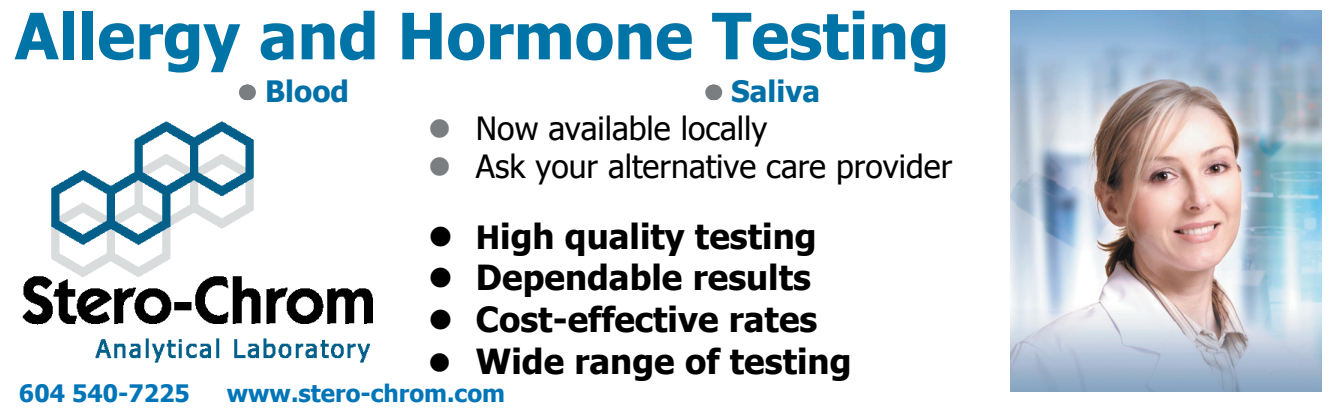
– Robert S. McNamara

Our society is run by insane people for insane objectives. I think we're being run by maniacs for maniacal ends and I think I'm liable to be put away as insane for expressing that. That's what's insane about it.

– John Lennon

Ishi graduated from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2001, with a BFA major in photography. He makes films, collects cacti, and ponders many things. Currently he is trying to figure out what to do with the rest his life.

contactishi@yahoo.ca,
waiting to hear echoes back.



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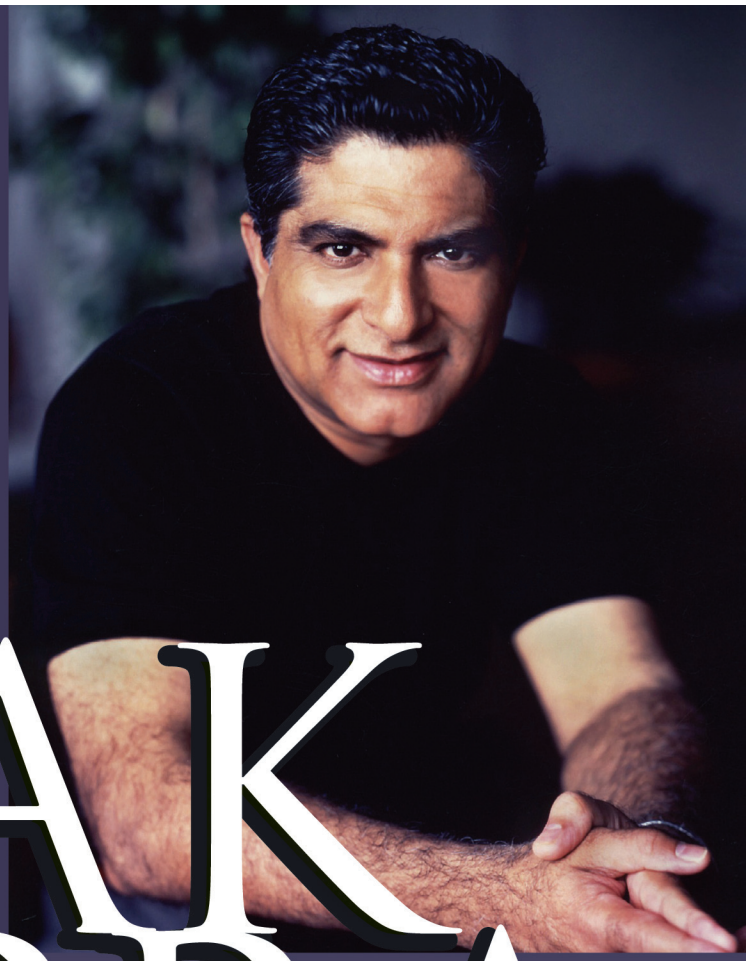

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Walks on the wild side

FILMS WORTH WATCHING

by Robert Alstead

Zac is a sensitive young boy from a large, Catholic, Quebecois family in the late '60s. As his mom, guided by the mystic Tupperware lady explains, he is "different," with a gift for healing people's burns by thinking about them.

Zac is uncomfortable with the fact that he doesn't like normal boys' stuff, and feels constantly put upon by his three elder brothers. At Christmas, which also happens to be his birthday, he wants a pram, but his dad insists on buying him a hockey game. Although mom objects, dad gets his way. More than anything else, Zac wants to be accepted by his doting, but gruff, dad. At night, Zac prays to God that he doesn't turn into a "fairy," but his feelings refuse to go away.

This may not sound like the premise for a box office smash, but *CRAZY* has proved to be one of the most successful films ever at Quebec box offices. It's also Canada's entry for the Oscars in the foreign film category, the shortlist for which comes out next month.

The story is as much about looking for paternal acceptance, as it is about the sexual confusion of a boy turning into a man, which probably explains the film's wide appeal. Director Jean-Marc Vallée, who cast his own son in the role of Zac from six to eight years old, and good-looking groovester Marc-André Grondin as the 15 to 21-year-old Zac, is careful not to screen anything that would turn off mainstream audiences. At the same time, this is a film that offers emotional depth, humour, and an intelligent exploration of its subject.

Vallée uses insinuation and creates mood with ease, his experience as a commercial filmmaker evident in the film's

Zachary gets picked on by his brothers.

stylish and inventive imagery. The tone of the film is varied, from amusing sketches of family life to scenes delving Zac's inner angst, where Vallée's heavy use of Catholic iconography and myth can seem over-portentous. Nevertheless, the pervasive RC mysticism adds to the flagrant Quebecois flavour during this flared-trousered, chain-smoking era, spanning the '60s, '70s, and early '80s. Soundtrack classics, such as David Bowie's *Space Odyssey*, the Rolling Stones' *Sympathy for the Devil*, and Patsy Cline's pivotal *Crazy* (the title is also an acronym for the five siblings) add an extra layer of nostalgia.

CRAZY has a fine ensemble cast, with Michel Côté perfect as the ebullient dad, whose paternal love is tempered by his failure to acknowledge his son's feelings. He has good on-screen chemistry with both of the actors who play the sons. Danielle Proulx, as the mother who indulges her son when dad isn't looking, grows in stature throughout, and Alex Gravel is memorable as the leather-trousered, "waster" brother Raymond.

At 129 minutes, the film is too long – maybe the dad shouldn't have been allowed to do his stock party piece, singing along to Charles Aznavour so often – but not drastically long. All the ingredients are here to keep you hooked until the haunting, bittersweet resolution.

Two other new films that I haven't yet seen, but which are getting good reviews on the film festival circuit, are similarly themed. *Brokeback Mountain* (23rd), the new film by Ang Lee (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, The Ice Storm*), explores the forbidden love between two cowboys (played by Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal). The film, which has been dubbed a gay *Gone With the Wind*, shows how the men's friendship unexpectedly turns into something intensely sexual, during their stint as sheep herders in the solitary wilds of Brokeback Mountain. (The film was shot in Alberta.) Lee focuses on the irreconcilable damage that the two men cause, both to themselves and the people in their lives, by pursuing a double-life of raising a family, while continuing their secret affair.

Breakfast on Pluto is another period gay drama opening this month on the 16th. Set against the backdrop of the troubles in Northern Ireland in the '70s, the film, directed by Neil Jordan (*The Crying Game*), follows Patrick "Kitten" Braden (Cillian Murphy), a deprived, but spirited, Irish youth turned transvestite-prostitute, who hits the road to London in search of his mother. The film is both tragic and comic in tone, featuring a nostalgic, pop soundtrack, high camp, and Liam Neeson as a Catholic priest.

Finally, if you missed the screening of the GMO doc *The Future of Food* by California-based Deborah Koons Garcia, you can get the double-disc DVD at www.futureoffood.com this month.

Robert Alstead writes for www.iofilm.ca

Give peace a chance: John's legacy

by Gerry Deiter

I had no one to share my grief with. Sitting aboard my boat in an isolated coastal town in northern BC, CBC's evening concert was interrupted by a news flash: John Lennon had just been shot in New York city and pronounced dead on arrival at hospital.

Typically, the first reaction to such news is to immediately share the grief with someone, a loved one, but my grief was more terrible since I was alone, a stranger in a strange place, with no means of contacting the outside world. I thought I'd have to carry this burden myself, but as news reports emerged, I learned that crowds were gathering in Central Park and heaping flowers, lighting candles, and singing. I was not alone; the world was sharing my grief.

Years before, I had looked into John's and Yoko's eyes and saw their love. I had laughed with them and shared their joy. My mind now travelled back 11 years to June 1, 1969, where in suite 1742 of Montréal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel, I participated in, and photographed, the controlled chaos of the Bed-In for Peace. John, with dark, shoulder-length hair and full beard looked like Jesus in white pajamas, while Yoko, her long tresses draped over her shoulder, wore a long, white nightgown. For a week, they had received visitors as they lay in bed; hundreds of people had been through the room: politicians and celebrities, journalists and reporters, photographers, poets, artists, and hundreds of young people who'd waited hours in a hot, stuffy hallway to bring gifts and perhaps even have a word with John and Yoko.

The event marked the beginning of Lennon's ascension from rock star to the leader of a worldwide peace movement. "We're not *against* anything," he'd told an interviewer. "We are *for* peace."

A touching moment. Photo © Gerry Deiter

Earlier that week, John and Yoko had received a phone call from Berkeley, California, where a serious confrontation was shaping up between police and hundreds of people who had been camping in People's Park. The conflict had been going on for days, and the obviously frightened caller told John and Yoko that the riot squad was preparing to move in. He asked what message he should pass along to the people. John urged them not to resist physically, but to try and minimize the violence instead. Yoko then picked up the phone and spoke these famous words: "All we are saying is give peace a chance."

Several days later, John scrawled those words on a poster board and expanded upon them. That evening, a recording studio was set up in the suite and about 40 people, including TV star Tom Smothers and LSD guru Dr. Timothy Leary, surrounded the bed and sang those words in chorus, as John called out the lyrics. In the 36 years since they were recorded, these words have become the root of the first truly global peace anthem, sung in every language, and in every land, where people oppose tyranny and war.

John had outgrown his *Beatles* persona; with Yoko, he continued his work for world peace and justice until he was assassinated. His example, along with the now famous words, became his legacy to the world.

The events subsequent to September 11, 2001 made me realize that, more than ever, the world needed to hear John and Yoko's message of peace, compassion, and understanding. I could feel John's presence at my side, giving me his energy and urging me to help him in his campaign. I also realized that the photographs I took during those eight days in Montréal were my own legacy.

For the past five years, I have shown the photos and talked about their message in art galleries, movie houses, museums, coffee shops, and music festivals in the US and Canada. They have also previously appeared on the pages of *Common Ground*. To help remind people that this December 8 marks 25 years since John's physical voice was silenced, my images will appear at the Royal BC Museum in Victoria as a complementary exhibit to the photo exhibit *Linda McCartney's Sixties*. I feel privileged to help bring John's message to the world.

Gerry Deiter's Bed-In for Peace photos will be shown as a complement to Linda McCartney's Sixties: Portrait of an Era *exhibit at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, December 1 to January 30. Deiter presents a talk about the Bed-In photos on both December 3 and December 8, the anniversary of John's death. For more information, visit www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca. To view a collection of Bed-In photographs, visit www.elliottlouis.com*

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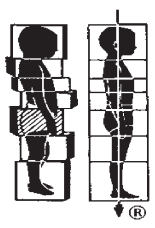

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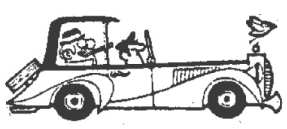

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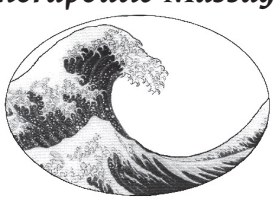

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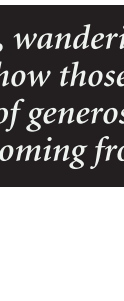

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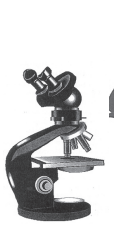

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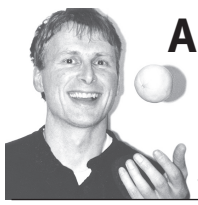

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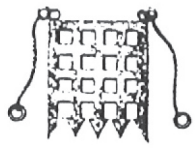

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www.sos.org

To all of our brothers and sisters, whatever your beliefs, faith or customs, at this time of year we invite you to pray with us, "Let us put our heads and our hearts together and find ways and means to practically knit the world together in love. Let us spread the fragrance of God's love and make human integration a reality." ~ Sant Rajinder Singh

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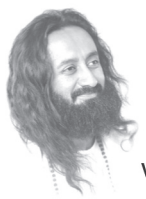
WEDNESDAY EVENTS 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm • **HEALING** 7 pm
SUNDAY SERVICES 11:00 am – See *DATEBOOK: Sundays*

Dec. 07 - Psychic Demonstration & Participation - Barbara Leonard • Dec. 14 - Open Circle - Lyn Wells • Dec. 21 - Winter Solstice Celebration - Glenda McLeod & Julia Schoennagel • Non-members $8 Members $7 • Dec. 28 - CLOSED FOR A HAPPY HOLIDAY! • Wednesdays will resume January 4. 2006

SPECIAL EVENTS: Sunday, Dec. 18 - Festival of Light Service at 11 a.m. • Saturday, Dec. 24 - Christmas Eve Service at 7:30 p.m. No charge. Everyone welcome.



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On giving

by Kent Nerburn

Giving is a miracle that can transform the heaviest of hearts. Two people, who moments before lived in separate worlds of private concerns, suddenly meet each other over a simple act of sharing. The world expands, a moment of goodness is created, and something new comes into being where before there was nothing.

Too often we are blind to this everyday miracle. We build our lives around accumulation – of money, of possessions, of status – as a way of protecting ourselves and our families from the vagaries of the world. Without thinking, we begin to see giving as an economic exchange – a subtracting of something from who and what we are – and we weigh it on the scales of self-interest.

But true giving is not an economic exchange; it is a generative act. It does not subtract from what we have; it multiplies the effect we can have in the world.

Many people tend to think of giving only in terms of grand gestures. They miss simple openings of the heart that can be practised anywhere with almost anyone.

We can say hello to someone everybody ignores. We can offer to help a neighbour. We can buy a bouquet of flowers and take it to a nursing home, or spend an extra minute talking to someone who needs our time.

We can take $10 out of our pocket and give it to someone on the street. No praise, no hushed tones of holy generosity. Just give, smile, and walk away.

If you perform these simple acts, little by little you will start to understand the miracle of giving. You will begin to see the unprotected human heart and the honest smiles of human happiness. You will start to feel what is common among us, not what separates and differentiates us.

Before long you will discover that you have the power to create joy and happiness by your simplest gestures of caring and compassion. You will see that you have the power to unlock the goodness in other people's hearts by sharing the goodness in yours.

And, most of all, you will find the other givers. No matter where you live or where you travel, whether you speak their language or know their names, you will know them by their small acts, and they will recognize you by yours. You will become part of the community of humanity that trusts and shares and dares to reveal the softness of its heart.

Once you become a giver, you will never be alone.

Excerpted from the book Simple Truths: Clear & Gentle Guidance on the Big Issues in Life, *© 2005, by Kent Nerburn. Reprinted with permission of the publisher, New World Library, Novato, CA 94949*

DATEBOOK

Winter Solstice Dec 21

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

List at: www.commonground.ca > Advertising > Datebook

DEC 3
Mosaic Exhibition Artists Reception 6-8pm. Experience the extraordinary stained glass mosaic works of artist Nicala Swiednicki. Showcased all month at Favourite Things Gallery in New Westminster. Free. 614 Columbia St., 604-519-1815.

DEC 5-9
The **Yoga-Sutra of Patanujali**: a validation of the personal mystical experience with Michel Angot, Sanskrit scholar, Rosemary Heights, Surrey. 1-800-849-9955 or info@quatuor.cc. www.michel-angot.com

DEC 9-11
Return to wholeness with Neelam through self-inquiry and resting in the heart. Fri 7pm, ($20), Sat and Sun 11-4pm, ($50-100). Pre-registration required for Sun., 1495 W 8th, 604-254-9150.

Introduction to **Foot Reflexology** commences Certificate Weekend Course. Intro: $10, Course $295. Pacific Institute of Reflexology 604-875-8818.

DEC 10

Peace on Earth workshop – meditation, chanting, philosophy. Yoga Studio, 2111 West 16th, 7:30-9:30pm. $35/prepaid, $40/door, $50 for two. Hirdaya: 604-677-3350, hirdaya@sprint.ca

DEC 10-11
Diamond Approach Vancouver introductory weekend. Peace and the Mystery of Being. $190, 10am-5pm. Ongoing group beginning 2006. judithbradley@shaw.ca 604-251-9034.

DEC 17
Wolfsong Winter Solstice/ Medicine Wheel Celebration Saturday, 7pm. Participate singing shared Native sacred healing chants. Bring friends, drums, cedar flute, didgeridoo, crystal bowls. Vancouver Multi-Cultural Centre. Donation. Turtle Island Healing Circles. 604-418-9636, www.drumcircles.ca

DEC 18
Christmas in the Round – Jerry DesVoignes & MantraVani Orchestra Solstice celebration. Multi-cultural songs & chants. Trinity St. Marks Church, 1805 Larch St., 7:30pm. $20/advance, $25/door. Banyen, Hilife, Utopia. 604-872-7117.

Psychic Fair 1-4pm. Experience mini readings and aura healings. Receive info about your relationships, spiritual purpose and more! Meditation and healing classes available. Christmas Eve service, Dec 24th, 11:00pm. CDM Psychic Institute, 1114 W. Broadway, Suite 202, Vancouver. 604-730-8788.

DEC 24-27
Christmas Celebration Retreat – A silent, spiritual retreat to experience the full spiritual depth of this beautiful time. Includes special Meditation times, nourishing food, and comfortable accommodation. SRMH Centre, Sunshine Coast 1-604-740-0898.

DEC 29-JAN 1
New Year Gathering – A spiritual gathering to listen to Divine wisdom, share thoughts for the coming year and devotional chanting. Includes special Meditations. SRMH Centre, Sunshine Coast 1-604-740-0898.

DEC 29 – JAN 2
New Year's Retreat - Practice Tao Yoga, Chi Kung, and Meditation with Universal Tao Instructor Minke de Vos. Clear your past and open to the future. Transform emotional energy into spiritual power. Quadra Island Harbour House, 604-669-2505, siground@island.net, www.SilentGround.com

FEATURE VENUE

Rime is a one-of-a-kind performance space and eatery in Vancouver that supports local musicians. They look forward to having you as their guests and to spoil you with world-famous Turkish hospitality. Here's a sample of their many December offerings:

Dec 3 (evening) – Pepe Danza's Drum Prayers & 50th Birthday Bash! Happy Birthday, Amigo! www.pepe-music.com

Dec 8 – Remembering John Lennon: Looking through a Glass Onion
Guitarist Ron Samworth and friends celebrate the life of John Lennon. Pete Schmitt, bass; Skye Brooks, drums; vocalists Elizabeth Fischer, Jason Michas, Kate Hammett-Vaughan, Kevin House and surprise guests.

Dec 13 – AIR Amir Koushkani (tar, vocals), François Houle (clarinet) and Sal Ferreras (percussion). Passionate Persian and contemporary improvisations.

Dec 15 – Ancient Sunlight beautiful and poignant. Miles Black, piano; Dave Say, saxophones; Laurence Mollerup, bass; Pepe Danza, percussion. www.milesblack.com

Dec 26 – Rime First Year Anniversary Bash with surprise guests (no cover). Looks like we made it! It's good to be alive and well after our first year in operation. We'd like to thank all the artists, neighbours, staff, and our beloved customers and music lovers for your support and encouragement over the past year.

Details: Most concerts $5 to $10 sliding scale, 9pm. Open nightly for dinner & live performance. Lunch Saturday & Sunday. 1130 Commercial Drive, Vancouver, 604-215-1130. www.rime.ca

DEC 31
Conscious Connections Social Club - Community of holistic, fun loving and caring people where kindred spirits meet to share common interests. Saturday Brunch – December 31. _www.conscious-connectionssocialclub.com

JAN 7
Ten Principles of Consciously Creating based on Fred Sterling's work. Powerful tools for awakening our conscious awareness, & creating our desires. 12 Weeks, $156.00. Call Sharon - Facilitator - 604-762-7932. www.SharonTaphorn.com

JAN 11, 18, 25 & FEB 1
Re-Charge Your Everyday Living 6:30-9pm. Expand your comfort and "living" zone. Create healthy relationships and environments. Live consciously. M.A. Leadership/Counselling. Call 604-733-1393.

JAN 22
Register now for the Alzheimer Society of **BC's Walk for Memories** Jan. 22. Starts at the Rowing Club in Stanley Park. Registration 8:30am. Walk 10am. www.walkformemories.com or call Sandra at 604-681-6530, ext. 319.

JAN 28-29
Explore the Feminine Principle with renowned Buddhist scholar Judith Simmer-Brown. In this 2-day workshop, you will learn to release the creative power of your mind through storytelling, lectures, and meditation. Info: 1-800-976-3652.

SUNDAYS
The Centre for Spiritual Living Inspired by the teachings of Deepak Chopra and Louise Hay? You'll love our Sunday services, 11:00am. Children welcome. 1495 W. 8th Ave, Vancouver, 604-321-1225 www.cslvancouver.com

International Spiritualist Alliance #1A -320 Columbia Street, New West (Downstairs) 604-521-6336 . Sunday Services 11am . Rev. Joyce Tarvin 604-433-6663 See resource directory. www.isacanada.ca

Eco-Village Vision Plan Presentation – creating multiple communities and practical methods for achieving success. 7pm Sundays. Call for Vancouver location: 604-839-8819.

TUESDAYS
Reflexology Student Clinic sessions - only $15. Evenings only. By appointment. Pacific Institute of Reflexology. 604.875.8818

Pranic Healing Clinic – Non-touch energy healing. By donation. Tuesdays 11am-3pm. 2950 Laurel St, Vancouver. Closed Dec. 20 & 27th. 604-988-1102, www.pranichealing.ca/vancouver

WEDNESDAYS
Hawaiian Healing Night 7pm. Hawaiian guided Meditation, Sharing the Aloha,and snacks after, meet like-minded people and share. $5.00 donation. At Hale Ola - a place of Healing 1215 Madison ave. Burnaby 604-431-7474 Kaimana and Moanikeala

Children of War fundraiser Chai Gallery at East Is East hosts a fundraiser for Children of War (www.thechildrenofwar.org) featuring local musicians & traditional dancers. Wednesday evenings, 7:30 pm-1:30 am, 3243 W. Broadway. Tickets at the door or call 778-837-1862. By donation.

Meditation & Self-inquiry: Have you lost the balance and rhythm in your life? Let stillness (through self-inquiry) return your wholeness. 5-7 pm. 317-1613.

THURSDAYS

Pranic Healing Clinics – Non-touch energy healing. By donation. Thursdays 10am-2pm, and 6-9:00pm. 204-133 E. 14th, North Vancouver. Closed Dec. 22 & 29th. 604-988-1102, www.pranichealing.ca/vancouver

ONGOING

Free Meditation workshop: Experience kundalini awakening through Sahaja Yoga, as taught by Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi.& enjoy your Powers at our Weekly classes, always free and open to all. 604 597-8440 www.sahajayoga.org

Chakra Workshop: Get energized in the New Year! Jan 19 – Mar 9, Thursdays, 6-8pm. Discover your connections to your energy centres. $150. Michele, 604-734-4372. rubenfeldsynergy.com

Letters

Growth philosophy fatally flawed

I enjoyed your interview with Peter C. Newman (Nov 2005) as I have his books. Apropos of this, here are some comments for *Common Ground* readers.

Canada does not have room to grow; this is an antiquated myth. Seven people per square mile are a lot of people. Too many; a square mile is not much space. The fact that it doesn't seem like it, relative to other nations, is simply an indication of how much worse off the rest of the world is – the rest of the world that we're increasingly helping sustain in this global economy that lacks the benefits of global community. It is especially too many when you consider how an overwhelming horde is crammed into a few narrow pockets that have an appealing climate.

Finally, even if we did have room to grow, it's a creed we, and the rest of the world, desperately need to abandon – this "growth is good" thing – in favour of an economy based on establishing sustainable limits (most of us will have to go on a serious diet to achieve it), and living healthily with that status quo. Growth, a philosophy designed to serve the few, has been fatally flawed from its inception. Humanity, as a global entity, is already a thousand-pound man in a hundred-pound dinghy, brown waters lashing at the gunnels. We need leaders to help steer us away from an economy dependent on glutting us further if we don't all wish to eventually go down with the ship.

It's time to think outside this soggy box. Our model of civilization is not an immutable reality. We can build a better one.

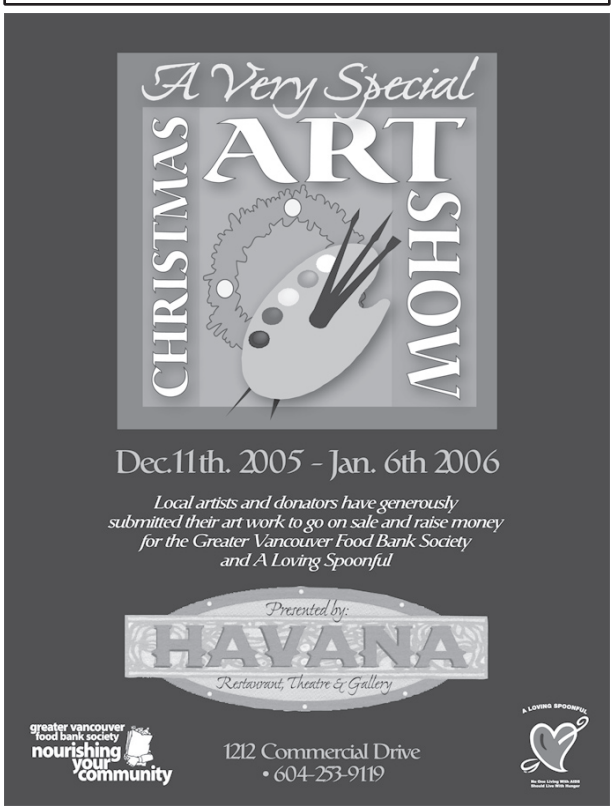
Jonathan Wright, East Coulee, Alberta

Planetary blues

With regard to David Suzuki's November column, National Sustainability Act long overdue, government should worry less about the economy and far more about our degrading environment, especially the degradation caused by a dozen companies in Canada, which produce almost half of the air pollution.

All governments, and political wannabes, should consider the following pertinent question: "What good does it do to create or preserve businesses and jobs when the planet is degrading, and people are getting sick because of pollution due to mass construction?" It makes one wonder how long the Blue Planet can remain ecologically viable.

Frank G. Sterle Jr., White Rock, BC


A Very Special
CHRISTMAS ART SHOW
Dec.11th. 2005 - Jan. 6th 2006
Local artists and donators have generously submitted their art work to go on sale and raise money for the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society and A Loving Spoonful
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A LOVING SPOONFUL

On Track Zodiac

December 2005

by Ilona Hedi Granik

ARIES (March 21 – April 19)
Trying to think your way out of conflict and struggle may prove very tiring. It may help if you let go of the things you can't change. Cut ties with your past by changing your mindset.

TAURUS (April 20 – May 21)
You have a sense of pride and feel no need to make excuses for the way you are. You turned your personal demons into strengths. You speak from the heart and shoot from the hip. Now, aim higher.

GEMINI (May 22 – June 20)
Routines are not routine. You complete and start new projects with intensity. Exhilaration is high; ride the follow-your-bliss wave. You revel in the tides of change. Dynamic energy feeds both your desire and your drive.

CANCER (June 21 – July 22)
Your sanctuary gives you immense pleasure as you put out the welcome mat to bless all who enter your home. Your reflective nature and sense of style find the perfect outlet. It may be hard to get out of your comfort zone; that is perfectly fine.

LEO (July 23 – Aug. 22)
You may feel responsible for the people in your life. While you're fully capable of fixing problems, sometimes the powers that be aren't in your control. Possessions may lose their meaning, and a new cycle of fertility begins.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 – Sept. 22)
You could very well have a self-revelation. You might make significant changes in your career and take action to create excitement in your working environment. The pen is mightier than the sword.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 – Oct. 22)
Believe in your vision. Set your goals and aim high. Cautionary steps are useful while you blend your high vision with practicality. You can't learn to swim if you don't even dive into the water.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 – Nov. 21)
You might feel more sentimental than usual. You dream about what you have lost and seek to rekindle the magic in your life. If possible, go beyond your regular routine and accept invitations to surrender. Are you a true partner or a dutiful mate? Love and commitment begin with you.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 – Dec. 21)
You have been through a metamorphosis, which could continue well into 2006. Your chameleon-like qualities could have you changing directions without notice. You seek more purity in your surroundings as you recognize your duality. Shake hands with the whole of your multidimensionality.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 – Jan. 19)
Your close circle of beloved ones is of primary concern during this time of love and friendship. You are on a deepening journey to the centre of your love. Whether you are a parent, daughter, son, or sibling, recognition is awarded and praise given.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 – Feb. 19)
Soul-searching brings enlightenment and you have only scratched the surface. Don't bother fastening your seat belt on the upcoming emotional roller-coaster ride. If you resist, you will become stiff. Maintain your equilibrium and land gracefully. You are supported beyond your wildest beliefs.

PISCES (Feb. 20 – March 20)
Depending on the karmic fabric that runs through your life, you could either isolate yourself indoors or immerse yourself in a veritable crowd. The pendulum will also swing to the other side. You continue to accept a paradox. Your reverence for life is the path to which you are devoted.

Ilona Hedi Granik is a clairvoyant consultant and author with 31 years of experience in astrology, multi-media art, and healing. ilona23@shaw.ca

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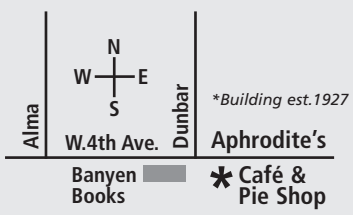

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Vanishing starscape

by Ralf Kelman

Would all former fluorescent babies please raise your hands? If you were born in an urban centre anytime after the '50s, you probably started your journey in a fluorescent-lit incubator facing a world of artificial light and rapidly diminishing natural darkness. Historically, the first alarm bells about light pollution began ringing when architect and astronomer Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723) complained that newly installed gas lighting in the Piazza San Marco in Venice spoiled the subtle and romantic effect of moonlight on the popular square.

From the late 1800s to the 1950s, electric carbon arc and incandescent street lighting significantly changed the world's urban lightscapes, but it still had limited impact on the rural environment. To this point in human history, astronomers had not yet experienced a serious impediment to their ability to see the stars. Subsequently, the mercury and sodium vapour high-intensity discharge lamps eliminated the softer, colourful glow of the age of incandescence and neon, and moved humanity into the glare of an over-lit post-WWII era.

In the late '60s, many astronomers realized they had to join forces in a fight to save the dark sky. The dark skies that the international astronomy community long depended on are rapidly disappearing. Major observatories like Mount Palomar and Kits Peak are desperately seeking solutions, having become victims of their own silence; not one observatory was willing to admit that it had a problem for fear it would lose key research funding.

At the UN Habitat Conference at Jericho Beach in Vancouver in 1976, one of the focuses included the negative impact of manufactured light on human settlements. As a non-governmental, forum guest speaker, along with Buckminster Fuller, Mother Teresa, Margaret Mead, and others, I hammered home the emerging, global issue of light pollution. Working with film producer and site chief Al Clapp, I also illuminated the site with heritage neon and incandescent fixtures and took delegates on light tours of the city. This major, international event planted the seed for a series of ongoing UN initiatives and reflected the spirit of newly formed Greenpeace, media and culture guru Marshall McLuhan's teachings, and a number of UBC urban planners, including professor Peter Oberlander.

Next year marks the 30th anniversary of Habitat. In June of 2006, 8,000 to 10,000 UN delegates and experts will attend World Urban Forum 3 in Vancouver. Leading up to the main conference, a number of programs and events, sponsored by UBC and SFU, will take place. Future issues of *Common Ground* will feature more information about this huge, international event on global sustainability.

Rural setting with natural night light.

Photo: www.hrmacmillanspacecentre.com

Simulated city lights in rural setting.

Another important light-related anniversary of note is the marking of the 100 years since Albert Einstein's pioneering discoveries in quantum mechanics and his landmark discovery of the equation E=MC2, including an alternative theory of light. To learn more about Einstein's groundbreaking work from 1905 onward, I recommend the excellent article *One Hundred Years of Uncertainty* (Op Ed), published in *The New York Times* on April 8 this year. PBS has also produced a great documentary special on his extraordinary life and work.

The dark skies that the international astronomy community long depended on are rapidly disappearing. Major observatories like Mount Palomar and Kits Peak are desperately seeking solutions.

In Vancouver this past September, the H. R. MacMillian Science Centre opened *Our Vanishing Sky*, an exhibition partly inspired by the International Dark-Sky Association, based in Tucson, Arizona, and its Canadian branch representative Robert Dick, an astronomy instructor at Carleton University and national chair of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada's light pollution abatement committee. The first of its kind in Canada, the exhibition takes on the challenge of educating the public, government, and industry on this important global issue. As noted in a news release: Light pollution is light that is not needed or wanted, including light that is too bright. Through educational text display panels, looped video presentations, interactive activities, and a Planetarium show demonstrating the before and after impact of night light pollution on major cities around the globe, *Our Vanishing Sky* educates visitors about the disturbingly negative effects of light pollution on their lives and what they can do about it. The exhibit continues to this summer.

Executive director Donna Livingston and her staff, including resident astronomers David Dodge and Peter Newberry, have created an intriguing and illuminating program with some surprises even a battle-weary veteran with 30 plus years experience of fighting the fluorescent plague can appreciate. The ticket price includes entry to all the exhibits. Weekdays at 3 pm, a terrific Planetarium show brings the cosmos and urban lightscapes to life. On the day I attended the show, an astrophysicist called Wanda ably described the mysteries of the cosmos and how light pollution, including sky glow and light trespass, affects our health and well-being, as well as reducing our ability to see and enjoy the stars. The show's amazing images of London, England; Los Angeles, and Vancouver at night could have been enhanced, however, with more exhibit-related information about what the dramatic and varied multi-coloured light sources mean to astronomy and urban planning.

One of the Space Centre's most interesting offerings is the virtual voyages motion simulator. While not promoted as part of *Our Vanishing Sky*, it's a multi-sensory experience of light that depicts an imaginary Martian city nightscape. Show-goers participate in a virtual take-off and landing in outer space, and it reminded me of the trippy, multi-media light shows that highlighted such acts as Jim Morrison and *The Doors* when the band played at the Retinal Circus on Davie Street. I caught some of those great shows when I attended the Vancouver School of Art, and I

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Gifts that make a difference

Fair trade gifts keep giving

Purchasing a gift from Ten Thousand Villages means that families in developing countries can raise animals, grow vegetables, and send their children to school. Ten Thousand Villages is a non-profit, fair trade organization that provides vital, fair income to people in the developing world by marketing their handicrafts and telling their stories in North America. The Living Gift is a special program of Mennonite Central Committee. Purchase one of four Living Gift projects and receive a handmade ornament and card for the recipient of your choice. Projects include providing corn for families in Burkina Faso, purchasing chickens for Croatian families returning home after years of political unrest, providing school uniforms and learning materials for children in Laos, and purchasing goats for a project that brings people together from different sides of the Rwandan conflict. Ten Thousand Villages stores are located at 1204 Commercial Drive, 2909 West Broadway, and 1387 Marine Drive in West Vancouver. www.TenThousandVillages.ca

Give a "wild" gift

A Western Canada Wilderness Committee membership is educational, sustainable, action-oriented, and lasts all year. New members receive a beautiful wildlife card bearing the name of the giver, as well as many membership benefits. Choose between an individual ($30) or family membership ($52). Other gift ideas, including books, cards, posters, videos, hemp products, First Nations products, and more are available at WCWC's online store. Visit www.wildernesscommittee.org/store/. You can also honour a loved one, who has died, by making a donation to the Wilderness Committee in his/her memory. Call 1-800-661-9453 for more information about gift-giving options.

Adopt an animal: save a habitat

The Land Conservancy of British Columbia offers gift certificates, holiday getaways, boat cruises, and adoption and sponsorship gift packages, as well as heritage preservation packages. For a $35 donation, you can help preserve an animal's habitat or maintain a piece of property in BC. Children's versions of many of TLC's property and heritage conservation and animal adoption gift packages are also available. Gifts, such as clothing, books, and gardening items may be purchased at TLC's retail stores. To order from TLC's online catalogue, visit www.conservancy.bc.ca Call 1-888-738-0533 or email enterprises@conservancy.bc.ca

Buy a fruit basket and fight diabetes

Green Earth Organics is offering fresh fruit gift baskets filled with organic edibles to raise funds for the Canadian Diabetes Association. Baskets cost $50 and all profits are donated to the Canadian Diabetes Association. Each fruit basket contains a delicious selection of fresh, certified organic fruits, nut bars, teas, information about diabetes, and a16-page recipe booklet, published by the Canadian Diabetes Association. Free delivery is available to residents of Vancouver and surrounding areas.

To purchase baskets, call Green Earth Organics at 604-708-2345, or order online at www.greenearthorganics.com

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allergenic or toxic effects on the humans and animals that consume them. If the lines are unstable, no amount of testing can guarantee their safety in the future, or when they are subjected to different environmental stresses.

Genetic engineers have no control over where their foreign DNA constructs will be inserted into the host cell's DNA. Research has revealed that the insertions often occur inside or near genes, which can be turned on or off by the invading foreign DNA. This can have serious consequences.

Of particular concern are fragments of foreign DNA that appear in virtually all genetically modified crops: the cauliflower mosaic virus (CaMV) promoter is used to ensure that the foreign genes continue to express their proteins at a high level. This viral gene switch, or promoter, is able to stimulate the expression of genes, not only in plant cells, but also in the cells of mammals, including humans. This promoter is in all the cells of transgenic plants. Thus, the question of whether it is broken down by digestion processes, or ends up in cows milk, or in the muscles and blood of animals fed GM feeds, or in the milk of breast-feeding mothers, becomes a really important issue.

When critical scientists have raised these concerns, proponents have responded that we have been eating cauliflower, which is sometimes infected with this virus, for a very long time with no apparent consequences. However, the cauliflower mosaic virus promoter used in genetic engineering is, in its naked form, unlike the natural wild-type virus that has a protective protein coat. The naked forms of viruses are more infectious because their viral coats generally determine host specificity. CaMV promoter is particularly prone to integrate into host cell genomes because it has a recombination hotspot, meaning it is prone to breaking and joining with other DNA at that spot. This increases the likelihood that the promoter, and any other genes linked to it, will be integrated into the genomes of cells they manage to enter. Cancer could be one of the outcomes in cells in which genes are turned on and kept on by this particularly strong promoter.

Throughout all GM crops, another hazard of this viral promoter is its potential to reactivate dormant viruses, which exist in the genomes of all higher organisms, including plants and animals. There is also a danger of the creation of new viruses by recombination. Yet another concern is the use of antibiotic resistance marker genes that could conceivably transfer resistance to bacteria in the mouths and guts of people and animals that ingest GM food and feed. It could also be transferred to bacteria in soil that surrounds the roots of transgenic plants, or soil that contains decomposing GM crop residues. Soil containing such bacteria could be dangerous for farmers and children, who might end up passing the resistance to bacteria resident in their own bodies. If pathogenic bacteria later infect them, antibiotics may prove useless because of transfer of the resistance gene from their resident bacteria to the pathogenic invader.

Concern about this possibility prompted the British Medical Association to call for a moratorium on field trials or commercialization of GM crops containing these genes. The European Food Safety Authority has also recommended that no crops containing antibiotic resistance marker genes be approved anywhere in Europe. Many of the crops growing in Canada carry these antibiotic resistance genes in every cell of the plant.

Safety assessments are necessary to determine whether these genes are present in soil bacteria, or in bacteria in the mouths, stomachs, and intestines of people who have been eating genetically modified foods. One major problem we face is the underdeveloped state of safety assessment science. We can only culture less than one percent of bacterial species found in soil, and in our own bodies. Is there any evidence of lesions in our digestive organs, especially in those of babies and young children? What about their immune systems and their livers and brains? If the foods are not even labelled, how can we know whether what we are eating and feeding our infants and children is harmful?

In 2004, people living near a field of Bt corn in the Philippines developed respiratory and gastric illness when the corn flowered. Tests of their blood revealed antibodies to the Bt toxin in the corn pollen, which suggested that it might have caused the illnesses. In Germany, between 2001 and 2002, 12 cows, illegally fed a steady diet of Bt corn, mysteriously died. Milk from the herd was tested and found to contain the genes for the bacterial Bt toxin. Neither Canada nor the US conducts tests on milk from cows fed GM feed for the presence of bacterial toxin or viral promoter DNA. How can we know if GM plants are producing dangerous allergens or toxic metabolites as a result of disruptions of plant genomes caused by the insertion of foreign DNA? We are part of one enormous feeding experiment in which none of us have given informed consent.

Pat Howard is associate professor of communication at Simon Fraser University. She teaches courses on scientific controversies and government regulation related to genetic engineering.

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intended. The other category, "fairly traded," is a term applied to those that choose to self-regulate their commitment, or who participate under an umbrella of guidelines set out by an established fair trade organization. For the vast majority, this practice is based upon a direct purchasing relationship with the producer. Most of these businesses claim to fulfill, or exceed, the basic principle of fair trade: a fair price for the work or product.

In some cases, merchants shy away from the fair trade label because they realize that the range of their products does not quite meet the full criteria. Despite this, the fair trade Drive initiative embraces every merchant that supports the concept in principle. Clearly, for many store owners, their product choices are a means of survival; not every store can offer a comprehensive range of fair trade products, such as Ten Thousand Villages does, but if a store is willing to sell even a single, fair trade product (Santa Barbara Market, for instance, sells fair trade coffee) it represents its full-fledged participation in the fair trade zone.

Sonja Kalathil, owner of Kali gift store located at the corner of Parker and Commercial, is an example of a non-certified seller who supports the initiative, yet finds herself in a gray area. Kalathil notes, "Many of our products are sourced directly from producers in Indonesia, who I have met personally. We know the conditions under which our items are made and we offer a price that is very fair. We know first hand that we are making a fair deal, but we don't advertise as "fair trade" because this is simply the way it is and I would not do this business if it were otherwise."

When will the fair trade zone be official?

Hope turns to Vancouver city council. Having collected 350 signatures in support of the idea, we knew that, according to the guidelines of the European model, we would need to garner the support of city council by having it fulfill a request to have The Drive officially proclaimed a fair trade zone. Vancouver is currently promoting a plan to allow a sustainable community model to flourish at the southeast side of False Creek. Despite this, David Suzuki and others have pointed out that BC and the rest of Canada have been doing very little to facilitate the increase of sustainable practices. Drive citizens have a choice to move ahead, even if government wants to drag its feet. A community of conscious-choice-consumerism is possible. We can soar past political fear and drive toward a concept that calls for diversity, sustainability, and a brave future for Vancouver.

Sean Osborne is a founding member of the fairtradedrive.org initiative, a community-citizen organization, which is building a coalition of supporters committed to education, activism, and the promotion of fair trade in the shops and businesses along Commercial Drive. A former computer animation director, Osborne is currently building the socially conscious Fair Trade Chocolate Company.

Why buy fair?

When you purchase a certified, fair trade product, you support the infrastructure that will allow fair trade to flourish. Similar to the way that charitable NGOs, such as Oxfam or World Vision, build structures to organize relief efforts, or raise consciousness through activism, the fair trade movement builds bridges between the North and South, between strong economies and the exploited. The difference lies in the slogan: "Trade not aid." Fair trade addresses the criticisms of charitable relief as a form of international welfare, by facilitating indigenous co-ops toward self-empowerment and self-control over their own agricultural resources. But this is not the entire picture. In order for fair trade to work effectively, fair trade co-ops in countries like Venezuela, Ghana, Cameroon, and many others, need to develop partnerships with markets in the developed world. Fair trade producers need fair access to our shelf space; otherwise, fair trade becomes nothing but lip service. For more information, or to lend your support, visit www.fairtradedrive.org

Resources:
Canadian fair trade certification: TransFair Canada www.transfair.ca
International Fair Trade Association: IFAT www.ifat.org/
Fair trade town initiatives: www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved_fairtrade_towns.htm
The Big Noise to Make Trade Fair: www.maketradefair.com/en/index.htm

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simply have to ask: Are there any flower children out there reading this article who remember those love-ins and psychedelic strobe-light performances? Back to the present, I am happy to note that *Our Vanishing Sky* runs through to the World Urban Forum in 2006, offering thousands of delegates the opportunity to visit the Space Centre and hear and see the latest findings about environmental lighting. In the same month, we celebrate the summer solstice on June 21.

Incidentally, I was born a Sagittarian, on the cusp of Capricorn, within hours of the solstice on December 22, 1947, just months after the Roswell event in New Mexico, which consequently sparked research into aliens and UFOs. Could this explain my lifelong fascination with light? As a self-styled Renaissance artist, I spent many passionate days promoting the light revolution on worldwide lightscape tours, including China and Japan, culminating during the year of Habitat with a retrospective exhibition called *Light Probe* at the Vancouver Art Gallery. I am pleased to discover that the torch is now being carried by newly formed organizations, such as the IDA and StarWatch, a province-wide survey of light pollution launched by the Ontario Science Centre in 2004.

In 1974, The Chicago Tribune *dubbed Ralf Kelman the Nader of the lightscape. Co-sponsored by Marshall McLuhan and the Canada Council, Kelman visited Chicago as a guest speaker for the American Institute of Architects. He has written articles for* Christian Science Monitor, The New York Times, The San Francisco Chronicle, Maclean's, *and* Weekend Magazine. *He was a guest on BBC Radio's* Jimmy Young Show *and was featured in London's* Sunday Times. *maverickintelligence@hotmail.com*

Light up the night on winter solstice

The Secret Lantern Society hosts a winter solstice event at the Space Centre on December 21. Between 3:30-5:30 pm, participants can make their own lanterns for a fee of $10, before joining the procession to the False Creek Community Centre. Originating 12 years ago, this multi-community happening takes place in the West End, Kitsilano, Yaletown, Granville Island, Leg-in-Boot Square, Strathcona, and Chinatown's Sun Yat Sen Gardens. Processions and musical performances start at 6 pm.
www.secretlantern.org
In Vancouver, the season of light began with the Diwali festival of South Asia, and continues from Channukah to winter solstice through to Christmas, inspiring a multitude of light displays, truly representative of folk art.
Beginning in early December, Christmas light tours and carolling boat cruises are a great way to celebrate the festive season. And don't forget to enjoy the pagan New Year's on the solstice.

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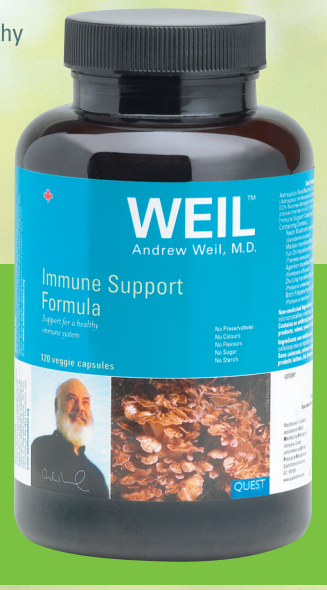

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